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DARK PHOENIX And The Prime-Time Vixens

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by Dennis Perado

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Death and taxes take us all, but the cut is worse for comics artists. Read about it in this editorial *by Richard Howell.*

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Cover by Terry Austin
Coloring by Tom Linehan

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OPENING NOTES

by Richard Howell

This past year we lost Wally Wood and Russ Manning, two of the truly great men of the comics industry. All of us—and the business and art form—are poorer for it. These two newest losses follow the deaths of other distinguished names in comics, including Bill Everett, Werner Roth, Bob Brown, John Rosenberger, and George Klein. It's a fact that we're in the 1980s now, and most of the men who were youngsters when comic books started are now getting into their fifties and sixties. Everybody dies eventually, and comics artists—despite their concerted alleigance to fantasy—are no exception. It's best to be prepared.

The most commonly-used phrase upon the death of a comics artist is that he "left a legacy of fine work behind him." Doubtless in most cases this is meant to refer to the readers and other artists whom that artist's work touched. There is a more literal translation of it as well, though, and from it many problems arise.

Comics artists, by necessity, turn out an incredible volume of work each year. If one artist produced and inked one monthly comic, he would be producing 260-300 *pages* of artwork each year. That's their *physical* legacy: the artwork itself. Now that Marvel and DC have agreed to return original artwork to the artists, some of those artists are able to make a decent subsidiary income from the sale of their pages to collectors. Therefore, title to the original pages is an asset, right? Well, not always.

When artist X dies, his original artwork is considered to be part of his estate, and each page is evaluated at *current market* (read, collector) *value*, and taxed. I know of at least one case in which the widow of a major comic strip artist was forced to sell most of her late husband's originals (*very* quickly) to avoid the tax payment on them bankrupting the estate. Yes, she still had to pay the inheritance tax, whether or not the pieces upon which she was paying the tax were the same ones she sold to raise tax money. She even had to pay, in the following tax year, taxes on the *sale* of the pieces, as it was considered *income* (no matter how fast it went out again). An unfortunate example of the double-edged "legacy" aspect of originals.

Perhaps artist X could will his originals to some public organization, such as the Museum of Cartoon Art, and at least leave his dependents a large tax credit (and ensure that his craftsmanship will be available for public viewing for interested generations to come)? Again, no. An artist's donation of his *own* work can only be evaluated—for tax purposes—at the cost of the materials involved in its production. That means if, say, Wally Wood's share of the Kirby/Wood originals from *SHOWCASE #6* (the first appearance of the Challengers of the Unknown) were donated last year *by* Wood, to the Museum of Cartoon Art, he could have deducted *the cost of the ink he used on each page, plus the cost of depreciation on his brushes and pens.* If Wood still owned the pages at the time of his death, his estate would be charged inheritance tax against a rough estimate of the art's market value (and it is not excessive to value such material at $300.00 per page—minimum).

Oh, and if, say, Andrew Mellon had acquired that artwork, and had donated it to a museum, *he* would be allowed to deduct the full collector value for it off his taxes. Anyone but Wally Wood could gain tax advantages from donating Wally Wood originals to a museum or any sort of public trust. Wally Wood could *only lose* by keeping his original artwork. Under the current system, any artist who would donate his work to a museum must be doing so either out of an entirely unselfish desire to supply samples of his work for future museum-goers, or to save his family from huge tax levies after his death. One major professional swore that he would rather bury his originals with him rather than leave it behind to plague his wife. Can anyone blame him?

It's possible to rail on about how the American taxation system is unfair to American artists, to sympathize with the —in effect—*double* bereavement of the families of deceased comics artists, and to become outraged that such an inequitable system is not changed. Any or all of the above are very suitable, conscionable responses to a double-bind of this nature, which afflicts—let's face it—some of our favorite people.

The trouble is, none of those responses will do any good for the artists, their families, the network of American museums, or the many museum-goers who would profit from having permanent exhibits of American comics art.

Some younger, "hot" artists would need to be *extremely* posterity-minded to donate a large part of their income (as the sale of "fan-favorite" pages certainly is) to a museum, inasmuch as their allowed deduction for it is negligible—or would it be better to let the artwork go whatever the lack of money or tax advantages, considering the disastrous effects it could have on the artist's surviving relations?

Fandom *can* do something about this inequitable situation. If each reader of this editorial sat down and wrote his or her congressman, decrying the present tax system's injustice to America's artists—making them aware that someone knows about and objects to the present system—then the first step will have been taken towards a system through which neither future generations of comics fans nor the artists themselves will lose.

Fandom has been called a very positive, constructive outgrowth of the comics medium, and this situation is a chance to actually *prove* that assertion. We can do more than squabble over "best inkers" and the companies' internal politicking. We can do some real good for some people who have given us a lot. Remember, willful ignorance of the situation is as good as ensuring it will survive to plague today's comics professionals and *their* loved ones—or as the old saw goes: "If you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem."

OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO PRODUCE COMIC BOOK WITH MARVEL

Reverend Mieczyslaw Malinski, official biographer and lifelong friend of Pope John Paul II, is assisting Marvel writer Steven Grant in producing a sixty-four page comic book planned for spring '82 release. John Tartaglione is pencilling and inking the special project which will relate the events in the life of Karol Jozef Wojtyla from childhood through the assassination attempt of May 13, 1981.

"The publication of ***'The Life of Pope John Paul II'*** does not reflect a desire on Marvel's part to endorse any religious doctrine," stated James E. Galton, President, Marvel Comics Group. Galton went on to say, "it is simply another manifestation of our contention that the comic book is an excellent vehicle for communicating exciting and dramatic stories to youngsters."

The book will bear a cover price of $1.50. Also planned are several foreign language editions for distribution overseas.

And as if to prove that comics are indeed nondenominational Mendy Enterprises has published an educational comic book entitled ***"Mendy and the Golem"***. Written by Leibel Estrin, drawn by David Sears and lettered and colored by Barry Grossman it will be available bimonthly and will feature educational stories about a young boy and his friend (a 450 pound Golem). The book presents puzzles, games and stories relating events from the Old Testament and should be of interest to Jews and Christians alike.

RONIN- THE STORY OF FRANK MILLER AT DC COMICS

In a move creating much consternation at Marvel one of their top artists, Frank Miller, writer and penciller of the widely aclaimed Daredevil book, has signed a contract to write and draw a project for DC Comics in the upcoming year. DC has not announced much about the project so far, but it is expected to be a 32-page comics series, twelve issues, and direct distribution only. The tentative name of the series title is ***"Ronin"*** (a term meaning "samurai without a master" or "rogue samurai").

Miller will be writing and pencilling the series, and there is some chance that he will be inking it himself. It has a scheduled release date of April 1983.

Miller is reportedly getting an unprecedented page rate from DC, as well as being allowed to retain the copyright on the concepts and characters. This latter point is an extraordinary ground-breaking manuever on DC's part and Marvel is expected to follow suit shortly with its announcement of its ***Epic Comics*** line.

Miller's status as the focus of this ground-breaking deal is due to the phenomenal increases in sales on his (and editor Denny O'Neil's and final penciller/inker Klaus Janson's) ***DAREDEVIL*** series, presently the industry's top seller for direct sales and the subject of an almost unbelieveable sales growth curve since Miller's assignment to the title.

Much of the income derived by a publisher in the comics field comes from such non publishing activities as licensing to merchandisers and the sale of overseas rights. These sources of profit in the past have been the sole domain of the publisher with the writer receiving none of the profits. In many other fields such as book publishing the creator retains all rights and sells only first publishing rights to the publisher. The rise of such alternative markets as ***Adventure Illustrated, Eclipse*** and ***Pacific Comics,*** and even the first tentative steps of Marvel Comics in ***Epic*** led DC to believe that in order to obtain the best material possible they would have to begin to allow comic book creators to retain the same rights as creators involved in other fields.

MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVELS ENJOY SALES SUCCESS, NEW TITLES PLANNED

The ***"Marvel Graphic Novels"*** Series has gotten off to a flying start with the astronomical success of the ***"Death of Captain Marvel."*** Despite initial dealer and distributor resistance the first printing of Jim Starlin's farewell to Marvel's Kree warrior sold out immediately and went back to a second printing within a week of release, with a print order of a staggering two-thirds of the original print run. With this in mind, Marvel's plan to penetrate the chain book market with it's series has received much sales encouragement.

The next volume in the Graphic Novel series is Roy Thomas' and Craig Russell's adaptation of Michael Moorcock's ***Elric.*** This volume is scheduled to ship in April and the bookstore chains are expected to respond more favorably to it with the prestige of an established paperback fantasy series behind it. After ***"Elric"*** the "Graphic Novels" series is expected to continue on a bi-monthly schedule of release.

The third in the series of Graphic Novels is Jim Starlin's ***"Dreadstar"***, which is a continuation of themes developed in the massive storyline as developed by Starlin in "Metamorphosis Odyssey" (which appeared in ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED*** and ***THE PRICE***). Marvel's sales department reports that ***"Dreadstar"*** will contain "a more optimistic tone" than recent Starlin work has boasted. The ***"Dreadstar"*** volume will also serve as an immediate lead-in to Starlin's upcoming ***Epic Comics Series***

The fourth in the "Graphic Novels" series is ***"The New Mutants"***, by Chris Clarement and Bob McLeod, and editor Louise Jones. As with ***"Dreadstar"***, ***"The New Mutants"*** will also lead into a regular comics series; a monthly comic featuring the adventures of the ***X-Men's*** new second team. Very little is known about the new team members themselves (except for part-timer Kitty "Sprite" Pryde), but most of them, reportedly, will be new creations of Claremont's and McLeod's. Editor Jones is very excited about the project, and says it will restore the "training" aspect to the ***X-Men's*** function. Unlike the majority of Graphic Novels, ***"The New Mutants"*** will be owned completely by Marvel Comics.

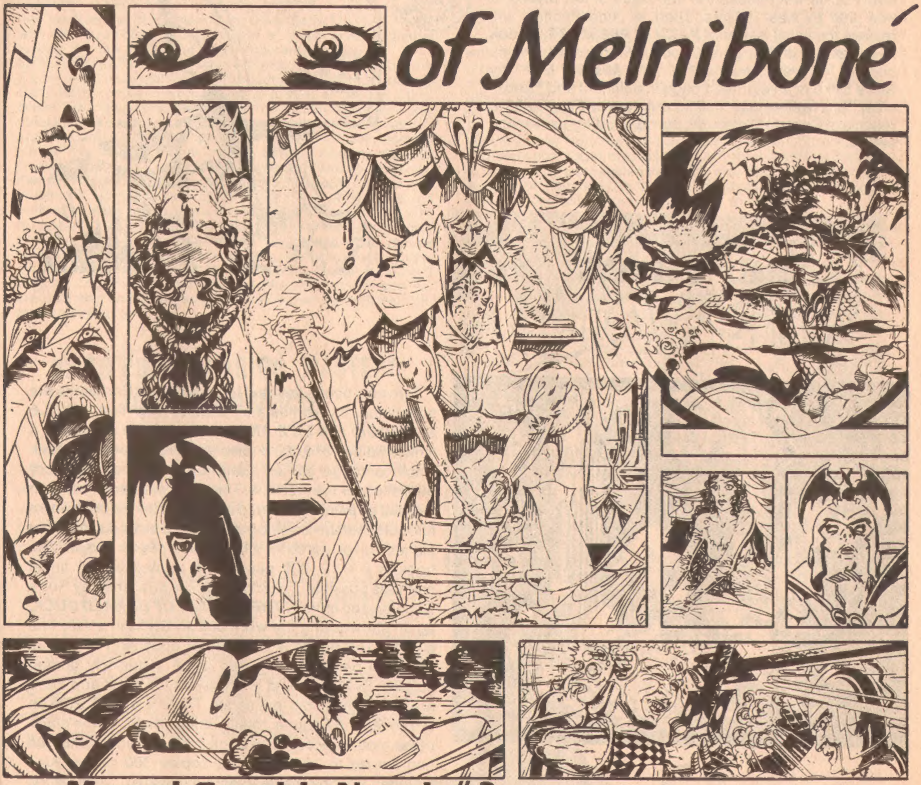
This will be the first of the Graphic Novels series to feature new characters which will be owned by Marvel Comics and not by the creators of the characters, and will therefore be a step backwards from the concept of creator's ownership rights, an immediate step backward from the progress the Graphic Novels have made in establishing creator's rights at Marvel Comics. Creators will once again not take part in the ownership of these more expensive, higher profit packages. Although the creative teams working on these Marvel owned Graphic Novels (and that includes Starlin's initial effort for the series) will profit from the increased royalty payments accrued from the slick-paper packages, their work in them will automatically become the property of Marvel Comics, just as if it were published in a regular four-color comic.

"The New Mutants" Graphic Novel will serve as the initial episode in the upcoming ***"New Mutants"*** comics series, but it will not be reprinted in that series, making it — in effect — the GIANT SIZE X-MEN #1 of the newer group. Editor Jones advises that the ***"New Mutants"*** series, as planned, will be full of surprises. In particular, she mentions that the expressions of the new character's mutant powers might change under the evolution of training. This hearkens back to the original series in which Marvel Girl, whose powers metamorphosized from telekenesis to full expression of latent mental capacities: telekenesis, telepathy, flight and empathy.

Upcoming in the "Graphic Novels" series are: a collection of the ***STAR WARS*** newspaper strip episodes, by Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson; Walt Simonson's ***STARJAMMERS*** project; and the ***X-MEN*** Graphic Novel by Claremont and Brent Anderson. This last announced project was the one which ***"X-Men"*** alumnus Neal Adams was scheduled to produce, but Adams and Marvel could not reach mutually satisfactory contract terms. Anderson is leaving his regular duties as ***KA-ZAR*** artist to draw the "X-Men Graphic Novel". None of these last three projects are scheduled at the present time.

JOURNEY TO THE ENCHANTED REALM OF...

ELRIC of Melniboné

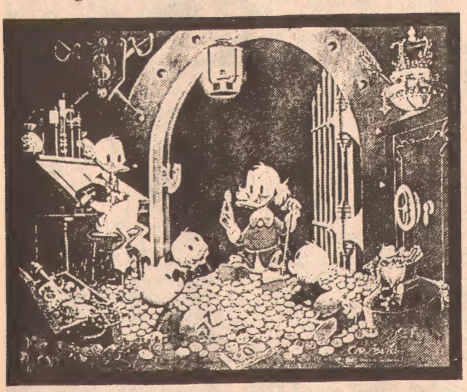


Marvel Graphic Novel #2

PACIFIC TO INCREASE PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

Pacific Comics will be releasing at least two books per month beginning in May. Early May will bring the release of ***STARSLAVER #4*** which besides presenting the normal ***"Starslayer"*** saga will also showcase a two page look at ***"Groo the Wanderer,"*** a new character from Sergio Aragones, a humerous barbarian warrior. Groo will make periodic appearances in ***STARSLAYER*** until later this year when he will receive his own title. In late May Pacific will release the first issue of ***Mr. Mystic,*** a new title by Neal Adams. Then in June Pacific will release the initial issues of ***PACIFIC PRESENTS,*** a book in the format of the old split-cover Marvels, which will contain the first installment of ***"The Missing Man"*** by Steve Ditko in an eighteen page installment and ***"Rocketeer"*** in a twelve page installment. June will also see the release of ***Captain Victory #6,*** the concluding issue in the series.

THE FINE ART OF
WALT DISNEY'S
Donald Duck



BY
CARL BARKS

Two new books devoted to the works of Carl Barks are scheduled for immediate release. The first, ***UNCLE SCROOGE: HIS LIFE AND TIMES,*** will be printed in a limited edition of 5,000 copies and will reproduce eleven Uncle Scrooge stories along with a brand new story published for the first time. The book will also contain an original oil painting created especially for the book and a full-color numbered lithograph signed by Barks. All of the stories are recolored for this editioin by Peter Ledger. The book is 9 + 12, 300 pages and printed by the finest methods possible. The other book is published by Rus s Cochran and entitled ***THE FINE ART OF DONALD DUCK,*** again showcasing the work of Carl Barks in a very fine edition. The books is a full color collection of all 122 Barks oil paintings collected in an exquisitely printed volume. Every painting is printed in full color and there are twelve giant fold-out pages. There is a color plate on the cover and another, totally unique plate, on the cover of the cloth slipcase. The book is signed and numbered and limited to 1875 11 + 12 copies 300 pages. Also included in one never-before-published Duck story, "Silent Night" from 1946. The publisher has maintained the quality previously established in his ***EC LIBRARY SETS*** and ***THE ERB LIBRARY.*** Both books retail at $200.

CAROL KALISH PROMOTED TO DIRECT SALES MANAGER BY MARVEL COMICS

Carol Kalish, formerly assistant to Direct Sales Manager Mike Friedrich, was promoted to the position of Direct Sales Manager of Marvel Comics upon the leaving of Mike Friedrich. Mike Friedrich, the former trend-setting publisher of one of the earliest alternative comics, ***STAR*REACH,*** was expected to leave Marvel Comics for some time. Friedrich, the first and only person to ever serve in the position of Direct Sales Manager, assumed the position with Marvel Comics when his own publishing venture encountered some financial setbacks. Utilizing the position as a means of repaying obligations he had developed when publishing Friedrich was expected to leave the position after fullfilling his obligations. On March first Carol Kalish, at that time Assistant Publisher of New Media Publishing, Inc., was hired to create a new position, that of assistant to the Direct Sales Manager. Kalish was then promoted to the position of Direct Sales Manager leaving the new position at least temporarily unfilled.

ASIDE FROM THE PUBLISHER: Here I will interupt the news section in a most unprofessional manner to inject what I feel must be said. Carol Kalish came to work for me in August of 1980 at a time when New Media Publishing was just beginning to grow and only published one magazine title, ***Comics Feature.*** With the assistance of Carol Kalish and Richard Howell NMP is now releasing almost five magazines per month, ***Comics Feature, Fantasy Empire, LOC, RBCC, Enterprise Incidents, Fantastic Exploits, Fantasy Images, Rising Star, Adventure Illustrated*** and ***Fantasy Illustrated.*** Both Richard and Carol put in very long hours and performed many critical tasks, not all of them pleasant. They also put up with me which is not the easiest thing to do. Carol not only performed her duties in the publishing company but without complaint also helped organize and run one of the most successful distribution companies in the country, Solar Spice and Liquors. Carol has now moved on to other things but I hope that the friendship and comraderie is something we will both maintain and long treasure.

DC TO PUBLISH ARION, MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

ARION, LORD OF ATLANTIS will become its own magazine, with issue #1 on sale in August of 1982. The creative team will remain Jan Duursema (artwork) and Paul Kupperberg (script). Laurie Sutton will be the editor. The character, who has gained popularity as a back-up strip in the ***WARLORD*** book will continue the same storyline begun in that book.

The Masters of the Universe, a group which first saw appearance as a co-star with ***Superman,*** in ***DC Presents*** #47. The characters are based on the Mattel toy figures. With Marvel's recent successes with such toys as the ***Micronauts*** and ***Rom*** DC has reentered the field which they first created with such books as ***Hot Wheels, Captain Action*** and the ***G.I. Joe*** appearances in ***SHOWCASE.*** The book will make an initial appearance as a sixteen page insert in November and will then appear as a three issue miniseries beginning the following month.

KITCHEN SINK PLANS A FULL SCHEDULE

Kitchen Sink Press Publisher Dennis Kitchen has planned a full schedule of releases for his company in the upcoming months. Starting off with a revival of a long dormant title ***DEATH RATTLE*** he will produce the fourth issue of this book with a cover by Richard Corben. The interior line-up will include material by Charles Burns, George Metzger, J. Michael Leonard and a back cover of the Freak Brothers by Steve Stiles. Also for April release will be the new issue of the ***Spirit magazine,*** issue number thirty-four, featuring a brand new Eisner piece on "Garbage," as part of his ***BIG CITY*** project, the usual crop of reprints and the first part of a wide-ranging interview with Milton Caniff.

May brings the publication ***THE ART OF WILL EISNER*** covering Eisner's career from his high school years to the present. This book is edited by Cat Yronwode and features an introduction by Jules Feiffer. The book presents many previously unpublished works as well as a large number of photographs of Eisner. It will be released in both a softcover edition and a signed, limited hardcover edition. Also on the schedule for May are ***THE OUTER SPACE SPIRIT*** collecting all of the stories of the Spirit produced by Wally Wood in 1952; the ***FANDOM CONFIDENTIAL,*** featuring Jim Engel and Chuck Fiala. The latter collection will collect the fumetti parody strip that has been running in the Comic Reader plus eight new pages created especially for this edition. Sixteen of the pages are scheduled to run in color. The back cover is by John Byrne and the book features an introduction by Roy Thomas. The book will be printed on heavy white paper.

AND DROPS LIKE A STONE - STUNNED, STUPOROUS.
BELOW, COLOSSUS IS WAITING
POW!
WOLVERINE!
I GOT HIM, BIG FELLA
I WAS HOPIN' FOR A KILL -- BUT AT LEAST HE WON'T BE FLYING ANY - TIME SOON.
THE SUCKER'S CRIPPLED, COLOSSUS. LOWER THE BOOM!
THAT, TOVARISCH, WILL BE A PLEASURE!
KRAKOW
NO!

Paul Smith's X-Men.

COCKRUM OFF X-MEN

Dave Cockrum has left the formerly best-selling ***X—MEN*** series due both to deadline problems and to friction between himself and his collaborator, Chris Claremont. Cockrum will accept no series work immediately, is reportedly discussing with Marvel the possibility of his writing and drawing a graphic novel based on a new group of Cockrum charactures (tentatively titled ***"The Mysterions"***). Fans should note that Cockrum developed many of the current ***X—MEN*** while doing the ***Legion of Superheroes*** strip for DC.

Paul Smith will be assuming the pencilling chores on the ***X-MEN*** book. Smith's work has been seen in the ***"Daredevil"*** back-up story in ***FANFARE #1,*** in ***IRON MAN,*** and he will be drawing the ***X-Men/ Ka-Zar*** team-up story in ***MARVEL FANFARE #4.***

THE BLACKHAWKS TO FLY AGAIN

The new "Black Hawks" series will be by mark Evanier and Dan Spiegle. There may be some back-up "War Journal" features drawn by Mike Sekowsky, and long time ***"Blackhawk"*** fan Tom Orzechowski may well accept the series as a regular lettering assignment. Mark Evanier recently wrote the pilot for the proposed ***"Daredevil"*** animated series and acts as a scripter and a contributing editor for NMP's graphic magazines as well as being very active as a West Coast based television and animation writer. Spiegle and Sekowsky both work heavily in the animation field and are under contract with NMP. Spiegle also does many back-up series for DC currently. Tom Orzechowski has long been respected as perhaps the best letterer in the industry and as one of the first to raise lettering to an art in itself. Tom is also under contract to NMP.

NEW MARVEL EDITORIAL LINE-UP

Marvel ahs re-assigned their editorial duties again. the new line-up goes:

DEFENDERS GROUP (Allen Milgrom, Editor)
DEFENDERS, HULK, DOCTOR STRANGE, ROM, MICRONAUTS, MARVEL FANFARE, DENNIS THE MENACE

SPIDER-MAN GROUP (Tom DeFalco, Editor)
SPIDER-MAN, PETER PARKER, MARVEL TEAM-UP, GHOST RIDER, G.I. JOE, TEAM AMERICA, MARVEL TALES, DENNIS THE MENACE DIGESTS

FANTASTIC FOUR/LUCAS GROUP (Jim Salicrup, Editor)
FANTASTIC FOUR, MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, STAR WARS, INDIANA JONES, WONDER MAN (limited series), **ANNIE, BLADERUNNER, DARK CRYSTAL, POPE JOHN PAUL, ELRIC, HAWKEYE** (limited series).

CONAN/X-MEN GROUP (Louise Jones, Editor)
CONAN, KING CONAN, SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, X-MEN, THE NEW MUTANTS, WOLVERINE (limited series) **CONAN MOVIE, KAZAR.**

DAREDEVIL GROUP (Dennis O'Neil, Editor)
DAREDEVIL, MOON KNIGHT, POWER MAN, MASTER OF KUNG FU, KULL, DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS MAGAZINE, DAZZLER, BIZARRE ADVENTURES.

AVENGERS GROUP (Mark Gruenwald, Editor)
AVENGERS, CAPTAIN AMERICA, IRON MAN, THOR, WHAT IF?, SPIDER-WOMAN, HERCULES (limited series), VISION AND SCARLET WITCH (limites series).

DC NEWS

Andrew Helfer, DC sometime-editor, former fan press liaison, and assistant to Joe Orlando has been promoted to special projects editor. He will serve under Joe Orlando and will work primarily on comics projects that are not part of the regular DC line.

DC has hired Mike Flynn to fill the post Paul Kupperberg left vacant in sales/promotion. Flynn will serve as Roger Slifer's assistant. He has a solid business background and has been a major comics fan for many years.

The new *"Pandora Pann"* feature, which was to debut in a preview insert in ***SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING #5***, has been pulled. Pandora's own magazine, which was to have premiered the following month, has been cancelled.

The first ***DC PRESENTS ANNUAL***, on sale this summer, will feature ***Superman*** teaming up with the ***Superman of Earth-Two***. It will also include the ***Superman of Earth-Three*** (called ***"Ultraman"*** of the Earth Three Crime Syndicate) as well as all three ***Lois Lanes*** and at least two ***Luthors***.

Alfredo Alcala will replace Ernie Colon as artist of ***ARAK, SON OF THUNDER*** as of issue #13

UNKNOWN SOLDIER will be cancelled as of issue #268

CAMELOT 3000 and ***THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERGIRL*** will appear on the October and November shipping schedules, respectively.

THE BEST OF DC DIGEST #28, on sale in June, will feature ***"Binky's Summer Fun"*** and will reprint, among other things, "Sugar and Spike" and ***"Doodles Duck"*** by Sheldon Mayer

Upcoming in ***ADVENTURE COMIC DIGEST*** after the new ***"Shazam!"*** stories run out are several episodes of ***"Challengers of the Unknown"*** by Bob Rozakis and George Tuska ***ADVENTURE COMICS DIGEST*** will be featuring at least one new story per issue, and will also be reprinting every story — in order — in which the ***Legion of Super-Heroes*** played a major role.

The upcoming ***JLA/JSA*** team-up for this summer will run in both ***JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA*** and ***ALL-STAR SQUADRON*** for three issues of the former and two issues of the latter and will feature the Crime Syndicate of Earth-Three (***Ultraman, Owlman, Superwoman, Johnny Quick,*** and ***Power Ring***, who appeared in ***JLA #29-30***). Art and story will be handled by the book's regular teams: Gerry Conway, Don Heck, and Romeo Tanghal (JLA) and Roy Thomas; Adrian Gonzales, and Jerry Ordway (ALL-STAR)

Gil Kane has done some upcoming work for DC, including a ***"Shazam!"*** story and an assortment of covers

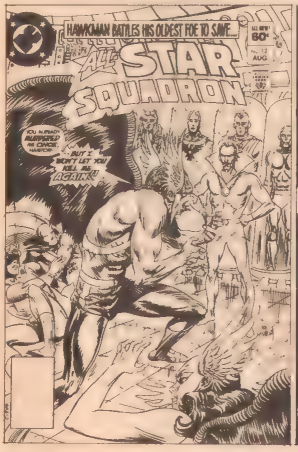
Dan Spiegle will be drawing this year's ***SGT. ROCK ANNUAL***. Script will be provided by Robert Kanigher.

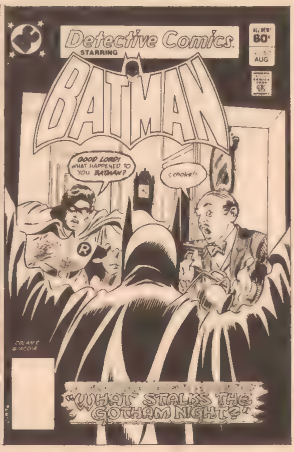
Cary Bates has left the ***NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY*** series. He will not assume any new series work immediately, but will continue on ***THE FLASH, SUPERMAN,*** and the syndicated ***LONE RANGER*** and ***BUCK ROGERS*** newspaper strips. Bates was recently flown out to England to consult with the producers of ***SUPERMAN III*** about problems they were having with their script.

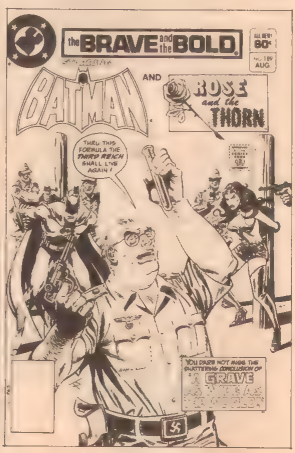
THE GREAT SUPERMAN COMIC BOOK COLLECTION, edited by Laurie Sutton, is a trade paperback costing $6.95. It reprints what might be the best selection of ***"Superman"*** stories ever to appear in one volume: ***"The Origin of Superman," "How Luthor Met Superboy," "The Supergirl from Krypton," "Superman's Return to Krypton"*** (all three parts), ***"The Nights in the Fortress of Solitude," "The Boy of Steel," "The Team of Luthor and Brainiac,"*** and the ***"Clark Kent Forever, Superman Never"*** four parter from ***SUPERMAN #296-9***.

A paperback reprint of the "World's Greatest Superheroes" story (from the newspaper strip) featuring ***Superman, Batman, Aquaman,*** and ***Wonder Woman*** versus ***Vandal Savage*** has been issued. It is black-and-white and costs $1.75.

Marv Wolfman has been hired by DC as a part-time editor. This move is designed to alleviate some of DC's need for editorial talent while not recruiting any more bodies into their overcrowded offices. Wolfman has served as Editor of the Marvel black-and-white magazines, Editor of Marvel Comics, and as a writer/editor at Marvel Comics. At DC Wolfman will serve as Editor of ***FLASH, NIGHT FORCE, WORLD'S FINEST WONDER WOMAN*** and ***GREEN LANTORN***. His assistant will be Ernie Colon.


HAWKMAN BATTLES HIS OLDEST FOE TO SAVE...
THE STAR SQUADRON
YOU WON'T BUMPERED HIS CRIME MURDER!
BUT I WON'T LET YOU KILL ALL AGAIN!




the BRAVE and the BOLD
AND
BATMAN
ROSE and the THORN
THRU THIS FORMULA THE THORN REACH SHALL LIVE AGAIN!
YOU DARE NOT RISE THE SLUMBERING OBELISK OF GRAVE

MARVEL NEWS

Upcoming in ***DAREDEVIL #187*** is the re-introduction of the Black Widow, Madame Natasha, with a slightly modified appearance, courtesy of DD writer/artist Frank Miller. Another change in the Widow is the alteration of her last name 'Romanoff," introduced by Gerry Conway in ***DD #84*** to its feminine form, Romanova. "If Natasha hoped that she could elude Russian agents by using Romanoff, tricking them into thinking she was a man," commented Miller, "she wasn't fooling anybody."

Steve Leialoha has left ***SPIDER-WOMAN***. No replacement has yet been selected.

John Buscema has taken over the artwork of ***CONAN THE BARBARIAN*** again.

The new scripter of ***POWER MAN/ IRON FIST*** will be Bob Layton. Denys Cowan will continue as penciller. Layton will also be inking PM/IF.

Carmine Infantino will be drawing this year's ***STAR WARS ANNUAL***

The Marvel paperback series has gone to black-and-white interiors and has reduced its cover price per copy to $1.75. This move was made due to a shift in printers on the books, although there was reportedly some sales resistance to packages in the earlier size/price configuration. The best-selling book in that series is the recent "X-Men" volume, which reprinted Len Wein and Dave Cockrum's origin story for the ***NEW X-Men***. That book sold over twice as many copies as the next best-selling volume in the direct market.

DENNIS THE MENACE will be cancelled after issue #12. Poor sales were cited as the reason.

Roger Stern will assume the writing chores of ***THE AVENGERS***, giving up ***GHOST RIDER*** in the process. Jim Shooter will take over ***TEAM AMERICA***. Stern plans to get Yellowjacket back on the right side of the law, but has no immediate plans to effect a rapprochment between Henry Pym and his ex-wife Janet (the Wasp) Van Dyne.

Marvel will be producing two mini-comics based on Peyto's and Goscinny's ***SMURFS*** characters, the leaders in the ratings wars of last year's Saturday morning shows. Peyo himself will be plotting the adventures, and the artwork will be handled by Marie Severin and Dan DeCarlo ***SMURF*** samples, and was extremely enthusiastic.

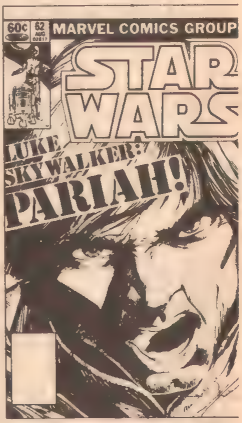
The ***SMURF*** mini-comics will measure approximately 2 + 2" and will be distrubted in more locations than just comics stores. Marvel is investigating distribution in toystores and Woolworths-type variety chain stores.

Red Sonja will be returning to Marvel comics later this year in her own mini-series. Marvel had recently lost the rights to the She-Devil with a Sword due to their not featuring her in her own publication as frequently as dictated by their contact terms, and their new mini-series is a direct result of terms in Marvel's new contract with the Robert E. Howard estate.

King Kull is also scheduled for more exposure. A two-part story by Doug Moench and John Bolton is being planned. The format for the publication of the story had not been decided, although a regular four-color comic is not out of the question.

BIZARRE ADVENTURES has been cancelled. It is being revamped into an irregular publication.

Marvel's adaptation of ***ANNIE*** will be by Tom DeFalco (script) and Winslow Mortimer (art). Marvel decided not to use Leonard Starr, the multiple-award winning artist/writer of ***ANNIE*** and ***ON STAGE***, and their next choice, Dan Spiegle, had to bow out because the script did not reach him on schedule and his other commitments intervened. ***ANNIE*** will appear as a standard magazine, in two issues of its own comic book, and as a treasury-size edition.



NEXT ISSUE:

FANTASY ILLUSTRATED

"THE DJINN"
by
Steve Englehart, Steve Ditko, Steve Leialoha,
and
Tom Orzechowski

Chapter Two

Tony Coyne and Ali Pasha pursue the Djinn and Ali's captive bride into the depths of a trap-laden temple, in *"Claustrophobia."*

1982 Steve Englehart and Steve Ditko

"The Hounds of Hell Theory"
Chapter Two

Alexander and Penelope encounter a houseful of suspects in their investigation. Will they succeed—or fall to another attack?

1982 Don McGregor and Tom Sutton

"RISK"
by
Don McGregor, Tom Sutton,
and
Susan Fox

"RAYDER"
by
Mark Evanier, Mike Sekowsky, Alan Gordon,
and
Tom Orzechowski

Reb Rayder continues his search for Doctor W. and a new Loyita —only to find *"The Creationists."*

1982 Mark Evanier and Mike Sekowsky

Bill Mantlo is probably the foremost example of the present-day Marvel Comics professional writer. He has served his apprenticeship as an emergency "fill-in" writer, and as a workhorse on such immediately unprepossessing series as "Sons of the Tiger," "Morbius the Living Vampire," "The Man from Atlantis," and "The Human Fly."

Today, Mantlo is the writer of PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, THE HULK, and two titles which he helped develop, THE MICRONAUTS and ROM, SPACEKNIGHT. In his stories, Mantlo stresses the old storytelling values: clarity, accessibility, and strict adherence to each series' concept.

Those qualities seem to be registering with a large part of the audience, for each of Mantlo's series are among Marvel's strongest, most consistent sellers.

Richard Howell and Carol Kalish interviewed Mantlo in NYC in late Summer, 1981. The interview was transcribed by Kurt Busiek, edited by Howell, and revised and approved by Mantlo.

An Interview with

BILL Mantlo

HOWELL: How did you get into comics?

MANTLO: I was an out-of-work professional photographer, immensely enjoying watching Watergate on TV, when Annette Kawecki called up—we had gone to school together, Cooper-Union School of Art, and she said "Do you want a job," and I said, "Ehh, not really," but she said, "Well, it's at Marvel Comics, and you always used to read comics," and it was a job as a paste-up mechanical person basically the bottom of the barrel in the production department. So I said, "That sounds interesting," because it would be in comics, but paste-ups and mechanicals are usually among the most boring possible jobs in the world, where you have to get pica measurements. It drives everyone up the wall. It's the bane of art students, and as an eight year art student who had four years of advertising, I got out of that as soon as possible, and went into photography. I didn't want to go back to paste-ups on the super-sophisticated level that's expected of you in publishing or advertising. But Marvel sounded like it might be fun, I mean, pasting up Thor or the Incredible Hulk, or something. So I went up, and I met and was interviewed by John Verpoorten, who asked me if I had any interest in comics, and I said, "Honestly, not really, 'cause I haven't read any since maybe 1969, 1968..."

HOWELL: You had given them up by then?

MANTLO: I went to the High School of Art and Design. My primary reason for going to Art and Design was that I wanted to draw comics—well, no, primary reason was to get out of Queens, New York. The thing that I hoped would get me out of Queens was that I liked comics, that I drew them all the time , and that my portfolio was good enough that Art and Design accepted me. Once I got into Art and Design, I stubbornly persisted in drawing comics for maybe the first year, despite all my teachers' efforts to show me that there was a world beyond Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby. And finally it began to sink in, and I began to

"George [Perez] and I decided that we both hated kung fu, so we were going to turn *'Sons of the Tiger'* into the kind of book we wanted..."

HOW MANY YEARS DID YOU BEAR THIS PAIN, GIRL?
YOU NEED NOT ANSWER YOUR SCARRED FLESH TELLS A TALE OF LONG SORROW.
FORGIVE ME THE BRIEF HURT I HAVE CAUSED YOU.
--EVEN AS I CANNOT FORGIVE THE EVIL THAT SLINKS AND FESTERS IN THE SHADOWS OF THIS MINDLESS PLAGUE--
--ENOUGH! THERE WILL BE AN ENDING!
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go more towards illustration and fine art, and become very intrigued by art history, and...just the whole range of art in general, so that by the end of my time in high school I was pretty much out of comics as an art form. At that point I guess Jack had gone to DC, and Steve had left, and there wasn't much for an old Marvel fan like myself to get into.

HOWELL: Familiar story.

MANTLO: Yeah, I didn't like John Buscema's stuff at all, and I wasn't crazy about Johnny Romita's *SPIDER-MAN*. In retrospect, I think my dislike of that stuff was asinine—y'know, I was coming off 38 issues of Ditko—whom I traced, y'know, I traced and I copied and I studied—and Johnny Romita just didn't have the kind of magic I wanted. It took me a long time to realize that he was probably a more appropriate artist for the way the character was developing at that time, anyway.

So I had these skills in illustration and advertising, and I knew I could do paste-up and design, so I went up, and John interviewed me, and I had a portfolio of paste-up and design, none of which was comics-oriented, and that's exactly what John was looking for, because what generally happens at Marvel is you get into production, and soon get sucked up into wanting to do the comics yourself. And John assumed that I would be beyond that, since I really had no knowledge of what had gone on. What began to happen then was—and is true of everybody who works in that office—you make such a low salary as a production person, as an editorial assistant—at that time, even editors were incredibly underpaid—that the only way to make a living is to do free-lance, y'know. The salary is the base pay, and then you do free-lance.

HOWELL: And because of the deadline problems...

MANTLO: Because of the deadline problems, nobody was there, and here you were in the office. They knew you'd be in every day at nine, the next day, so if you wanted to go home and stay up all night doing whatever it was you'd agreed to do, it was fine with them. Coloring was the first shot—again, I was an art major for eight years, so coloring didn't seem that hard. I went to Marie Severin for an assignment and colored a western that was kind of okay. Then she gave me a rush *WEREWOLF BY NIGHT*, which I botched completely. They wanted it overnight, and I went home and colored all the backgrounds brown, and she came in and said "No, no, no, the backgrounds have to vary," especially with Don Perlin's art at that time, where every scene was essentially the same. Doug and Don complement each other in that Don is a very quiet artist and Doug is a very static writer, so there's a lot of talking head stuff, for page after page after page. And here they were talking, and everything in the background was brown (laughter). So I had to go home and redo all that, and that's when I learned about deadlines—that there's an absolute deadline, and then there's the grace period (laughs) after the absolute deadline. Something is due on Tuesday, but it's really due on Thursday. So I did some all right coloring. I wasn't any great shakes, I always seemed to get the team books, that nobody else wanted to do—once I got to do a *DR. STRANGE*, which everyone loved, except I did not realize that the Orb of Agomotto is golden, so here I had a green Orb if Agomotto, and they had to change all that, and people walked around cursing at me for not having read *DR. STRANGE*. Anyway, along with Phil Rachelson and others who were non-comic-book people, we did a lot of the coloring that was going through, because we'd go home and do it fast. Then, Tony Isabella, who was an editor (I believe) in the black-and-white department at the time, and with whom I was office friendly (I believe Tony was the only comics person who came to my wedding) was getting way over his head. The black-and-white books were omnivorous. I mean, they were just consuming *vast* quantities of material. It was like an assembly line—churned out. There was a great contempt for the black-and-white material on the part of a lot of writers, who said, "This is garbage, I don't want to do horror stories, I hate kung fu stuff." Gerry Conway was doing something called *"Sons of the Tiger,"* which everyone believed was really being scripted by his wife. At one point Tony had pencilled pages by this new artist, George Perez, just sitting there, and he was supposed to write them. He was caught up in something else, and he was sitting in the office bemoaning the fact that he had a writer's block, and John Verpoorten was telling him that he had a block head (laughter) and I said "Wait a minute, you've got a job here, why don't you let me try and write it," and essentially that's what happened. I said "You can't write it, he can't write it, you have nobody else, the book's going to go out with seventeen or eighteen blank pages—or however many it was—so let me try it." And Tony being a very nice person, and very eager to let people get a start in the business, said "Sure, why not? What have we got to lose? At least it'll have words on it." So I went home, and this was Friday night, the thing was due Monday. I just scripted it without much difficulty at all, got through all the pages—of what I thought was really fine art by George—this was maybe his fourth art job—and then

realized that I'd lost a page somewhere. But the story read perfectly well. (Laughter) So we got to the office, found the page, wrote it there in the office, Tony read it over and with a few minor changes, said "This is fine," told me what was wrong with it, which was maybe in a couple of places there were too many words for the balloon space, or like that, which we easily corrected. It was sent out, and I guess it was no better or no worse than anything else that was coming out at the time, and he said, "Well, since you did all right here, why don't you do the '*Sons of the Tiger*'." George and I decided that we both hated kung fu, so we were going to turn "*Sons of the Tiger*" into the kind of book we wanted, and we went and got very cosmic for a while. That was the period where everybody was going cosmic—Englehart and Conway—whenever you couldn't think of what to do you went cosmic. Exactly the kind of story Jim [Shooter] hates now. They stretch on endlessly, and the denouement is that everybody becomes a god (laughter).

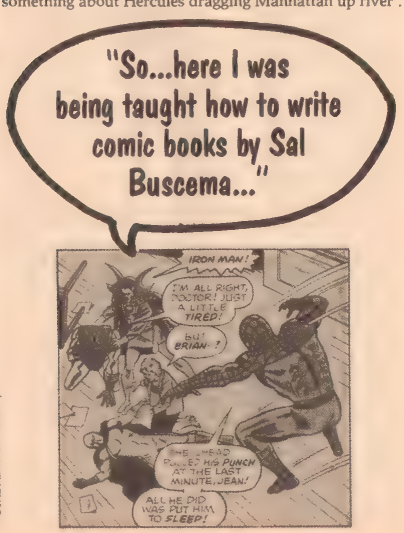
HOWELL: And then dies.

KALISH: Or becomes very irresolute. One or the other.

MANTLO: Yes, exactly. But it was a very good learning experience, in that I learned to deal with the emotions of various characters, I had to create a super-hero, the White Tiger, and then it all kind of fell apart. The *KUNG FU* magazine was doomed, I really had no rationale for The White Tiger being there, he was not kung fu, Jack of Hearts was flying in and out...In a sense, not being able to do a color book, I had done there what I would have done with a color book. And it was a good training ground, and then other things started opening up. *TEAM-UP* became available; I don't remember why *TEAM-UP* became available. Gerry left, and I'm not sure if it was to go to DC or whatever...

HOWELL: It might have been, at that point.

MANTLO: It might have been, I don't recall. I remember something about Hercules dragging Manhattan up river .


"So...here I was being taught how to write comic books by Sal Buscema..."
IRON MAN!
I'M ALL RIGHT, DOCTOR! JUST A LITTLE TIRED!
BRIAN?
ALL HE DID WAS PUT HIM TO SLEEP!

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HOWELL: Everybody remembers that.

MANTLO: And everybody saying "No, no, no!" And at that point, shortly thereafter, Gerry left (laughter). The way it worked was *not* "Hey, do you want to write *TEAM-UP*?" The way it worked was I was sitting in the office—I was still working in the office at this point—commiserating with Chris Claremont, who also worked in the office, about the fact that we got all the turkey assignments, and Len or Marv—it must have been Len, who was then the editor (what is now the editor-in-chief was then just the editor)—said, "Sal Buscema needs a *TEAM-UP* plot, get on the phone." So I said "Okay," quickly looked back through the *TEAM-UP*s to see who'd been used, and said "Oh well, we haven't done the Beast in a while. How about the Beast?" I asked, and everybody said, "Sure." I got on the phone, and said, "Sal, this is Bill Mantlo." He said, "Who?" "I'm going to be doing this issue of *TEAM-UP*, and they told me to call you up and get you a plot, so I thought I'd get you started, and then type up something and send it to you," so I said "It stars the Beast and the Griffin, and ..." We talked about it for twenty minutes, and Sal said, "Okay, that's it." That was it! Sal drew the whole story, without much more to go on. And then I made the mistake of going home and plotting the next four issues, which I think were much worse than they would have been had I just talked to Sal for half an hour, because Sal is the consummate comic book story-teller. You can talk to Sal for a half hour on the phone, and he will take your plot, and all the essential ingredients will be there, the pace will be excellent, everything that needs to be emphasized will be emphasized at the right time in the story and he'll bring it to an interesting resolution, and I've since learned that a plot for Sal should be no more than three-and-a-half pages of copy, because the man thinks about everything he puts down, and essentially thinks more visually than the writer—which is what an artist should do.

So that was quite an experience—here I was being taught how to write comic books by Sal Buscema, who would in essence take my overly convoluted plots and milk them down to what they should have been, which was good, solid stories. And I found as I wrote with Sal, that I was tailoring my stuff to fit his style, to the point where ninety percent of the time now, I think in terms of Sal Buscema when I'm plotting a story. I may vary that occasionally for what I call "artsy-fartsy stuff," where I'll give you your intro page of ten silent panels of people walking around—y'know, cinematic stuff—but that's rare. My feeling is that good comic books start with Sal Buscema—but that's my opinion of what the vast majority of comic books should be, which is readable for kids aged seven to thrity-seven. There should be a range of people who can enjoy this comic, and Sal fits that range to a "T." Other artists I've worked with will maybe hit the 25-year-olds, others will hit the six-year-olds (which is terrible, and never succeeds at Marvel). Sal caught that group that *is* Marvel much the same way that John Romita did, *definitely* the same way that Jack Kirby did. Even Steve Ditko, I think, was a rarity. Steve probably hit more the sixteen-year-olds, the older teen set. But people like Sal, John, Jack, can catch that entire audience and hold it. Some of them up at the upper end of the spectrum may complain about crudity or simplification or the fact that John Romita's Spider-Man never seemed to cling to buildings, or ceilings, or anything, but they're missing the point. The story was told cleanly, concisely, crisply, excitingly, with a minimum of redundancy or tediousness,

and that, I think is the benchmark of what a comic should be. I think that's pretty close to what Shooter's standard for what a comic should be is, also.

Anyway, from there, I started getting regular writing assignments, and at some point there was a big layoff at Marvel of production people (they wanted to cut their overhead) and at that point I was in the office every day doing production, but I was writing maybe two books a month at that point, and fast. I've always been incredibly fast, at least for the business it seems...

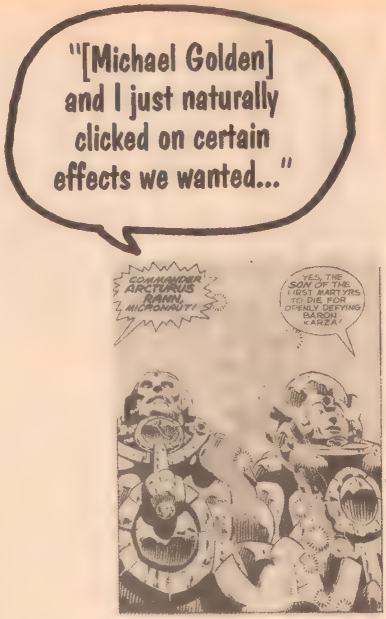
KALISH: You have three deadlines this week alone.

MANTLO: Well, other people tell me they do...I asked Dave Michelinie, he says he does six, seven pages a day. I forget what Claremont told me his pace was. On an average day I can produce twelve to fifteen pages. There's been days without much more effort where I've produced twenty-one. Last week I think I wrote fifty-seven pages. Without—as far as I can tell—any lowering of standards. Where my problems come in is in the plotting. It takes me a day to plot one book, which is three or four typewritten pages, because of the thinking involved, and that's after a week or two of thinking about the story. It's much easier for me, once it's plotted, to put words in the characters' mouths. So I'm a very fast scripter. The deadlock comes in when I have to plot. So now I've worked my schedule where I assume that I'll do a script and a plot per week *at least*. And if the script goes faster then I do another plot, and try to get myself ahead.

So anyway, I was kicked out of Marvel's production office very amiably, Sol Brodsky and John Verpoorten saw to it that I got quite a generous severance pay, which enabled me to go to Vermont that summer and write my little tail off. Every day up in Vermont, I'd be sitting out there by a lake, and I'd get a phone call, "We need a *'Sub-Mariner'* plot, we need..." (Laughter) And that was it. At that point I became a professional writer, a professional free-lance full time writer, and has not dimished since, that was six years ago.

KALISH: Have you ever made an attempt to apply your artistic training?

MANTLO: No. Understand that I majored in illustration at high school, and by the time I got to college I was almost totally involved in photography, which was mechanical production of images. What I have tried to apply—without much success, because I find that I'm talking to people who don't understand what I'm saying—is photographic techniques to comics. There was a recent *MICRONAUTS* that was supposed to have a photographic cover, which Pat Broderick thoroughly misunderstood, because people without any background in technical photography don't know what you're getting at. The artists for the most part don't have any, so it hasn't worked. Michael Golden is possibly the only one that does understand, and since he knows as much about it as I do, we just naturally clicked on certain effects we wanted, but otherwise the photography was pretty much confined itself now to the way I see things in plots. My plots will have some things that are described cinematically, or photographically, and whether the artist gets it or not is a fifty-fifty chance. At least I try to describe the scene, and the difference is always quite remarkable between my imagination and what the artist puts down on paper, because the artists are coming from a fairly rigid set of stylistic procedures. They've been drawing this way for X number of years, and they're damn well not going to change it for what I've put in the plot. Y'know, if you ask for an establishing shot of a landscape, there it is: Carmine


"[Michael Golden] and I just naturally clicked on certain effects we wanted..."
COMMANDER ARCTURUS RANN, MICRONAUT!
YES, THE SON OF THE FIRST MARTYRS TO DIE FOR OPENLY DEFYING BARON KARZA!
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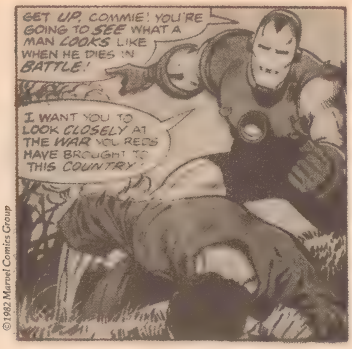
Infantino gives you a city on the horizon; someone else gives you a silhouette with little windows in it (chuckle from Howell). At this point you can predict which rubber stamp that artist is going to pull out of his tool kit and use for that shot. And of course there's others who don't do that, who deliberately break the mold and try for new shots, George Perez being the prime example, you know, who consciously, every time they do something, try for a new approach to it, but that's rare in the field, because the basis of comic books is speed. How much can you produce how quickly?

HOWELL: George is very fast, too.

MANTLO: George was exceedingly fast, among the fastest, maybe five pages a day at his peak, each page being more innovative than the last. Unfortunately it took a great toll on George, and he had to rest for a long time, and now he is bouncing back and forth between companies. I think he has reached the point where he just wants to draw things that interest him, and is no longer interested in keeping a monthly schedule—which is a luxury few of us can afford, because like it or not, these books have to come out every thirty days, and if you're not going to stick with it, somebody else is going to have to pick up the slack for you. And I find that situation grossly unfair, because when I came on, that's the situation I was faced with. Englehart or Conway or Wein or Wolfman or whoever *couldn't make* their deadline so Chris and I had to pick up the slack. We didn't have the luxury of sitting there two months and thinking up the greatest story ever told. We were told "Do it on your lunch hour,"and I think a lot of the early stuff we did reflects that. It was like learning on your feet.


GET UP, COMMIE! YOU'RE GOING TO SEE WHAT A MAN LOOKS LIKE WHEN HE DIES IN BATTLE!
I WANT YOU TO LOOK CLOSELY AT THE WAR YOU REDS HAVE BROUGHT TO THIS COUNTRY
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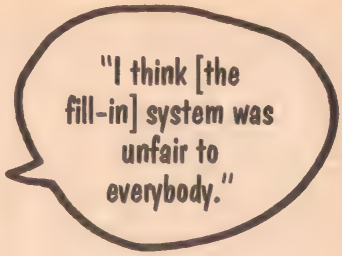
HOWELL: That was during that period you were doing many fill-ins?

MANTLO: Yeah. It was, y'know, "X writer over here, who's creating a masterpiece, which is gonna set the comics world back on its heels, is late, so you guys do a fill-in, so he can have time to craft his masterpiece." I always felt that was totally unjust. If a writer couldn't maintain a schedule, he had no business being a Marvel writer, he should be off somewhere creating one-issue masterpieces that we could slot in as annuals, or as special issues, and let the people who were good, professional writers take over the book on a monthly schedule and produce the work, so that it would be on the stands, in the kids' hands, every thirty days. My reason for this is that when I was a kid—I was a kid in the late 1950s, early 1960s—I relied every month on Mike Sekowsky doing the *JUSTICE LEAGUE*, and being there, and I forget who wrote it, I guess it was Gardner [Fox]. I counted on it. I didn't know the names, I didn't really care about the names, I just knew that every month, *JUSTICE LEAGUE* was going to have a similar look, a similar quality level, and then *SPIDER-MAN* and the *FF* and *THE AVENGERS* all were the same each issue, and they had a consistency of feel and a consistency of quality. If one job was silly, a little down, I knew that next issue the same team would try again, and I respected that. I mean, these people obviously cared enough to be there every month, and to want me to come back every month. Where I came into Marvel it was musical chairs—"Oh, I'm creating the Golden Arrow or the next Dr. Strange. Excuse me while I go meditate on this. You do a fill-in, or let's do a reprint." I found that grossly unfair to the readers, who were plunking down whatever the price was at that time, 35¢ or 25¢, for a reprint! Or for some fill-in that had to be done on someone's lunch hour because the regular writer or artist was too busy contemplating his navel somewhere. To me, "professional writer" means having the goddamn book in on deadline, being the highest quality you can muster, and being consistent. I would rather blow one out of twelve and be there every month than have eleven new stories and one reprint. I know I, and I think the kids, would rather see an interesting failure than something they've read before, or some effort that is obviously meant to plug the holes.



HOWELL: We had noted, during examining your fill-in period, that there was at Marvel a certain proprietary attitude toward certain characters and series, where it was very obvious that the fill-in writer (you in these cases) was not privy to whatever the writer's plans for the series were, and it was more like you were doomed to turn out, as regards the series' continuity, a second-class effort.

MANTLO: Yeah, there could be no continuity, because, again, the writer was off somewhere creating his next masterpiece, which directly followed his last masterpiece, so yours had to feature the physical appearance of the character yet forcing him to act in a vacuum. Beginning, middle, and end: solid action story, because everybody else was involved in whatever they were involved in last issue. J. Jonah Jameson was just about to put the key into the men's room lock, and you couldn't turn it in your fill-in story because he'd already turned it at the beginning of the next plot that either the writer or the artist was late on. So for an entire issue Jameson is standing there, desperately needing to go, his bladder bursting, but you couldn't help him. And of course, that sparked incredible resentment, because the Marvel hierarchy, which (thank God) Shooter has managed to practically eliminate, was so protective of their own little niches, their own little corners of immortality, that God forbid anybody should try to equal it or touch it, or interfere with it. So you had to do fill-ins so the Marvel hierarchy could take that month off and do the next great issue.

HOWELL: So, you're definitely of the opinion that that system was unfair to the people who had to do the fill-ins.

MANTLO: I think that system was unfair to everybody.

HOWELL: The readers also?

MANTLO: The readers, the writers, the Marvel hierarchy itself, because in a sense, it gave them a false sense of professionalism. You know, they would walk around with their chests puffed up, saying "We are professional writers," but when you asked for the proof, when you asked for the physical pages, when you asked for a book to be in on time, it was not there, because they knew that they had this buffer. Somebody somewhere was slaving to produce an inconsequential issue so they could have another month free.

HOWELL: Reminds me of the famous *CAPTAIN AMERICA* Steranko three-parter [*CA # 110, 111, 113*] during which after the second issue I guess Steranko was late or something, and they called up Jack Kirby, and said, "We've got three days until deadline. Can you do a quick fill-in? The story is that Captain America is dead," and Jack says, "Oh, you want me to bring him back to life, right?" and they say, "No, keep him dead. The entire issue." (Laughter)

MANTLO: There was a lot of that. I did some really

embarrassing ones. I did a *DEFENDERS* job, which has got to be the most abominable piece of writing since Steve Gerber's *IRON MAN* fill-in.

HOWELL: Tapping Tommy? (And his Golddiggers of Fear!!)

MANTLO: Yeah. I forgot what Steve's was...yeah, but I knew nothing about the Defenders. Had I been more secure in my position at that point—at that point I was still working at the office—in my regard of myself as a writer, I probably would have said "I don't know anything about the Defenders, get somebody else to do it." That was my first mistake. My second mistake was suggesting Sam Grainger to draw it. Sam Grainger had always been a favorite of mine from some weird Charlton strip he did (*'Fightin' Five'*). I had heard he was back. I was instrumental in getting him the inking on *THE X-MEN*. And then I said, "Here's this fill-in. Sam used to pencil, why doesn't he do it?" And a silly story, which could have been turned into a good, funny Busby Berkeley nonsense thing (and I sent him tons of reference on Busby Berkeley) didn't because Sam was the wrong artist. And again, being insecure, wanting a financial cushion, I wrote it gritting my teeth. Occasionally I still get that attitude, but in the past number of years I've felt more confident about saying "I don't want to write this." The *CAPTAIN MARVEL* job that someone else had plotted was presented to me recently, and I just turned it back and said "I don't need this grief. The plot is so asinine, so incompetent, it makes no sense, it's childish, and I don't need the work. Give it to somebody else who's trying to break into the business." So I've become, in effect, a senior writer, able to turn back work if I don't want to do it.

HOWELL: A working definition of a senior writer?

MANTLO: Maybe! It's definitely one. It's also the definition of a secure writer, and again, under Jim Shooter, I've become a secure writer, which never was in that entire changeover-of-editors period.

HOWELL: Len [Wein], Marv [Wolfman], Gerry [Conway], Archie [Goodwin]...

MANTLO: Yeah. Although Archie's problem was that Archie was swamped. At that point Marvel had not yet made the decision to have an editor-in-chief, and sub-editors, so it was Archie acting as buffer between all the writers, all the writer/editors, Stan, Cadence...and it was too much for anybody. I think with Jim they finally wisely realized that they needed compartmentalization, because we had grown too big.

KALISH: It seemed earlier in your career that you were being given some extremely odd projects, at least for Marvel books, things like *THE HUMAN FLY* and *MAN FROM ATLANTIS*, a lot of the adaptation books, that might or might not have ever had any commercial probability of existing. What was going on back then?

MANTLO: I'm not real sure what was going on back then. Somewhere along the line, I got labelled as the oddity writer (laughter). I don't know how this came about. I mean, if I tried to trace it back, I went from *TEAM-UP*, somewhere in there I did *FRANKENSTEIN*, *"Sons of the Tiger,"* *"Morbius."* I seemed to be offered books that were doomed to failure within three months because of the previous writers' incoherence. I would be three issues into a book, and they'd say, "We're cancelling it." I'd say, "Wait a minute! I just started it," and it had been cancelled on sales figures seven months prior to my arrival on the book, so any attempt I made to revamp it was meaningless, and a really crystal-clear encapsulization of that attitude came about when I was handed *"Morbius."* I think I did two

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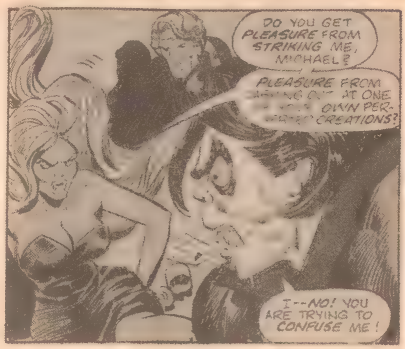
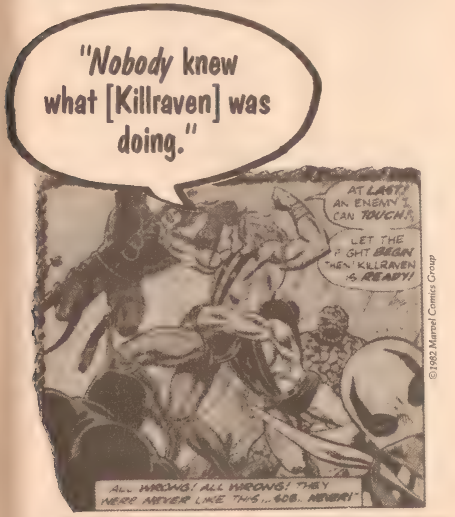


"I seemed to be offered books that were doomed to failure within three months..."

issues before it went down the tubes. Conway had just come off the book, Doug [Moench] did one issue on Gerry's plot, and gave it up for some reason I no longer recall, and I went in to Gerry, who was then the editor, and I said "What am I supposed to do with this book?" There was Morbius, coming out of some other dimension with a thousand-eyed creature (which I could not understand at all, it made no sense to me whatsoever). It was one of Doug's typical hyphenated villains, y'know, Thousand-Eyes, or Moon-Dragon, or Moon-Kingdom. As I recall, the plot had already been done for me, Gerry had plotted it and decided he didn't want it. When Gerry came back to Marvel, he decided he wanted to write eight books a month, but then thought maybe he'd be editor-in-chief instead and not write any, so there were all these loose issues which he'd plotted to make himself some fast money, but then didn't want to script. I went in and said, "Here's Morbius lying on the floor, what do you want me to say about what's gone on before?" And he said, "Have him laying there going, 'What a dream, I'm glad that's over.' " And this was the attitude, that it didn't matter—whatever anybody else did was meaningless. Your job was to come on to a book, and create it out of whole cloth. Marvel history meant nothing, but not *because* of Marvel history—just that you were so intent on being better than the past writer, or showing how stupid the past writer was, that you went to great lengths to negate everything he said. Your job was to come in and tell everybody, "It was totally false, it was totally meaningless, and the history of this book starts right here—with me taking over," or Marv taking over, or Len taking over, or Conway taking over. Whoever took over was starting all over.

KALISH: So much for the legend of Marvel continuity.
MANTLO: Yeah, and I think you're seeing it now, in *JUSTICE LEAGUE—"THE TRUE ORIGIN OF THE RED TORNADO!"* What was wrong with the *last* origin of the Red Tornado?
HOWELL: Or the one before that?
MANTLO: Or the one before that? Y'know, it's like, "I'm writing the book, so I'm going to tell you what really happened." That's the attitude that I think Jim is trying to tell everybody, "This is horseshit! This is infantilism. This is one-upsmanship. Forget this stuff! Just go in there and tell good stories, accept that everything you've been told up to now is true—unless there's some reasonable doubt, or unless there's some seed planted to elaborate on."

Yeah, so there were all these odd jobs floating around. This stupid *DEFENDERS,* a crazy *"Killraven,"* where I couldn't touch any of the main characters, so Killraven had to wander away and do something else. And believe me, if you think trying to do a fill-in of *"Killraven"* is easy, try it someday. *Nobody* knew what that character was doing (laughter). In retrospect, I went back and read Don's stuff—if you read, whatever it was, twenty issues *in a row,* I think now that it was brilliant. The problem (which Don refuses to understand to this day) is that no goddamn kid is going to buy twenty issues over a two-year period or three-year period for a bi-monthly book, and then go back and read it. Don refused to make sense out of each issue. He treated it as part of a broader tapestry, which would be laudable if these things weren't published to make money. Anybody coming in in the middle of the tapestry, all they saw was the fiber, and never understood that there was a bigger piece there, and that's criminal in this business. It's nice dilettantism, it's nice masturbation, but it's not comic books. It's not in any sense of the word what publishing a monthly magazine for kids is all about. I'm probably going to do a *MARVEL FANFARE* issue that wraps up the *"War of the Worlds"* stuff, and I think that I can tell everything Don did in one double-page flashback. "This is where we picked them up, this is where they went, this is where we left them, and NOW... here's the end of *'The War of the Worlds.'* "* All I know is I like the series a lot, but I think it was totally mishandled. There's other series I feel, other characters I feel have incredible potential but are being thoroughly mishandled. Jim feels that way about my *MICRONAUTS.* Here's a book that has the potential to be one of Marvel's top books according to Jim. I think it is one of Marvel's top books, but he thinks I'm doing it wrong, and I think his approach is wrong. We're in the process of working out our differences (or *not* working out our differences).


"Nobody knew what [Killraven] was doing."
AT LAST! AN ENEMY I CAN TOUCH!
LET THE FIGHT BEGIN THEN! KILLRAVEN IS READY!
ALL WRONG! ALL WRONG! THEY WERE NEVER LIKE THIS... GOD, NEVER!
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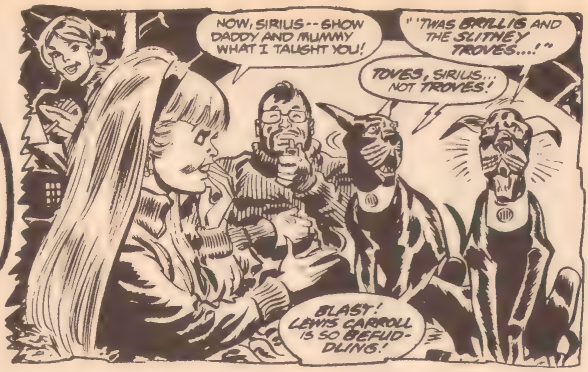
Anyway, there was a proprietary interest on the part of senior writers, there was a definite hierarchy. It seemed at that time that the key to being a successful Marvel writer was that you had worked for DC—that if you could claim that you'd worked for *two* companies, that made you better than all the hacks like me and Claremont and Moench who'd begun at Marvel, stayed with Marvel, and were loyal to Marvel. In fact, financially, if you quit Marvel, and went to DC, you could come back to Marvel at a higher rate than somebody who stayed at Marvel. It was a sign of success to shit on the company, go somewhere else, and then come back, and Chris, Doug, and I, and maybe Tony at that point, were left cleaning up the manure, without thanks, without reward. That went on for quite a while. There was also a theory that if you were Editor, you were supposed to write *THE HULK, SPIDER-MAN,* and *THOR.* Maybe *FANTASTIC FOUR.* It fluctuated, depending on who your favorite characters were when you were fifteen. That was what "Editor" meant at Marvel. Not that you were someone who was officious, not that you were someone who was efficient, who was a good administrator, or who was an excellent writer in his own stead—being an editor at Marvel meant that now you should be able to write whatever the top books were considered to be, and everybody else go what was considered the dregs. What this also meant was that they got the top artists, they got the top letterers, they got the top colorists, they got the top everything, and everybody else got what was left. Apparently there was a lot of that at DC at one point. I remember Frank Giacoia once telling me a story about Joe Kubert being considered the fairhaired boy. A Joe Kubert job got the best letterers, the best colorists, the best writers, whatever. If you were Frank Giacoia trying to pencil, really needing help, you know, a penciller who really needed Frank Giacoia to fix him up, and then a colorist to come along and add to it, you got whatever second-string talent was available. There was a lot of that at Marvel, and quite honestly I don't see any of that now. So that aspect of it was eliminated.
HOWELL: I'm not sure if we ever got an answer to the question about why you seemed to be getting the "out-of-the-Marvel-mainstream" projects, almost continuously.
MANTLO: I don't know.
HOWELL: It seems that a couple of them, at least *MICRONAUTS,* maybe *ROM*—we're not so sure about that—were your own choice.
MANTLO: Well, let's go back. The first out of the mainstream was *THE HUMAN FLY.* What was I doing at the same time? I think I was doing *IRON MAN.* I don't know. I think what might have happened (and this is

* Editor's Note: This story is currently being prepared by Don McGregor and Craig Russell for *EPIC.*

"Working with Frank [Robbins] is one of the more pleasant memories I have at Marvel..."


NOW, SIRIUS -- SHOW DADDY AND MUMMY WHAT I TAUGHT YOU!
"'TWAS BRILLIS AND THE SLITHEY TROVES...!"
TOVES, SIRIUS... NOT TROVES!
BLAST! LEWIS CARROLL IS SO BEFUDDLING!

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pretty typical at Marvel) is that something I was doing was cancelled, and they said, "Okay, you did this, but it was cancelled, so let's find you something else," and the first thing to come available was *THE HUMAN FLY*. Archie essentially plotted the first issue, and said, "This is what we want." The guy walked into the office in his silly costume, with all his agents (who were very sleazy Canadians who obviously wanted this guy to risk his neck so they'd make lots of money) and we listened to the public relations pitch, and got the little packet, and we didn't know who he was under the mask, we didn't know whether he'd really been shot up in Viet Nam or destroyed in a car accident. That was what they told us. But it sounded like a good idea for a book. Marvel wanted very much at that point to branch out into licensed properties, things that might have movie or TV tie-ins, and if the Fly succeeded in flying across country on the top of a plane, maybe they'd get some publicity and turn it into a movie—which Marvel would already have the book for. They wanted an *outside* the Marvel Universe *real hero*—no super powers, just an acrobat, a stunt man, and that's what I was assigned. Lee Elias and Frank Robbins were picked as two artists as more realistic—well, not realistic, because they're obviously cartoonists, but they fit a look that was not Marvel. It was not your muscled super-hero doing impossible death-defying acts, their style made the action look more gritty, more down-to-Earth.

HOWELL: More a newspaper strip?

MANTLO: Exactly. It would have been a good newspaper strip. And I said okay. It was kind of an intriguing proposal. Quite honestly, I don't remember all of what went on around *THE HUMAN FLY*. There I was thinking any book is better than no book. I thought the Fly had a lot of possibilities in that I could do one-issue stories. (At that time I was also beginning to think more along the lines of the old DC style, where you designed a cover first, then a situation, and created a story around it. I was beginning to get very tired of Marvel epics that seemed to go on forever and led nowhere. I thought there was too much epic-ism going around, that there were too many writers who didn't know what the hell they were doing, dragging these stories on *ad nauseum*, me included.) So *THE FLY* was a chance to do essentially one-issue stories, maybe a two-issue story every now and then. It was a chance to create traps, which was something Marvel didn't do and DC used to do quite a bit of. And I had fun with it, I like—I *love* Frank Robbins' art, as silly as it was, I think the man is—he's hilarious, working with Frank is one of the more pleasant memories I have at Marvel, because the man is supremely erudite, supremely funny, very sophisticated, witty, old school, very well-educated, world traveller...and he came out of the war with newspaper strips—at a time when newspaper strips were highly respected (in Europe, they were considered art form), and Frank reflected all that. To him, comics was like a return to the slums almost, but he never commented on that. He just took it gracefully, and tried to understand what we wanted. I remember the first job [for Marvel] he did was a *CAPTAIN AMERICA* job [*#182*], and he had Captain America flying, because it never occured to him that Cap couldn't. No one had ever told him. He figured super-heroes fly, so here's Captain America flying, and we just added some lines, and it looked like he was bouncing (laughter). Frank understood; he said, "Oh, they don't fly. Okay." Lee Elias, I thought, did quieter stuff, but also used that newspaper strip kind of approach.

HOWELL: It comes out of the same thing, the Milton Caniff tradition.

MANTLO: Exactly. And never having been part of that tradition, having grown up too late for that, I found this very refreshing. I'd worked with Sal, and Ron Wilson, and George—your Marvel muscular people, and *THE FLY* was a break from that. It was a chance to do something new, and I think what we were doing was fun. The problem with it was that it was drawn and written for a much younger audience, and at that time Marvel was just beginning to understand that there is a fan audience, a direct sale audience. Comic book shops were beginning to blossom all over the place. Marvel was caught (and is caught) in a bind, in which they have a distributor, who was ripping the company off, who was not putting books on stands, who was selling 200 copies for a nickel to somebody, rather than put them on the stands, and saying "Well, we took a loss on it and destroyed the books," and at that point there was an infant direct sale market that was buying maybe 30 thousand copies of each book and sending them to comics stores, without returns. This meant that Marvel got all the money up front, and never had to worry about a newsdealer shipping the books back six months later, and finding out that these great sales

figures that they had were suddenly meaningless. *THE FLY* didn't fit that pattern. *THE FLY* was a kid book, you know, 7-10-year-olds, and it totally ignored the fan market that was older, that went to the comic book shops, or that subscribed for their books. So Marvel was still experimenting and still learning that there are books that are *Marvel* and that are *not Marvel*. *THE FLY* was a non-Marvel book. In the 1950s it would have done admirably. In the 1970s it just was not right, because the fans weren't going to pick it up. *MAN FROM ATLANTIS* was a different story. As far as I know, it was doing quite well, but they cancelled the show, and Marvel didn't want to be associated with a dead project, with...

HOWELL: Like *STAR TREK*?

MANTLO: Well, there's a lot of Trekkies out there. There weren't a lot of Atlanties (Laughter). Again, I enjoyed it because it was Frank Robbins. I think we did some rather nice things, I remember some beautiful scenes he drew that had Mark Harris standing over some Atlantean ruins, but again, you could never correlate this with Sub-Mariner. It became like the DC thing of "Which Atlantis are we dealing with this issue?"

HOWELL: Mark Harris meets Lori Lemaris.

MANTLO: Yeah. So in effect, *MAN FROM ATLANTIS* never touched the Marvel Universe. The Fly touched it tangentially, I think he met...

KALISH: Spider-Man.

MANTLO: Did he meet Spider-Man?

KALISH: Well, he met Peter Parker.

HOWELL: Plus the Ghost Rider and Daredevil.

MANTLO: Right. So we began to work him into the Marvel Universe, primarily to get some sales interest going, but in *MAN FROM ATLANTIS* you could never do that. As long as you had the show, you didn't need to, because there's three million kids seeing the show and looking for anything that relates to it. We could have had a top-selling book there, if the show had continued. I agreed to do it on the basis of the pilot. I don't know if you saw the pilot for the show...

HOWELL: We didn't...

MANTLO: Archie called me in, plopped the videotape in the Betamax, and said watch this. The pilot was damn good. It was very science fiction-y. I forget who the villain was—it was probably Victor Buono with the beard—but it was as good as any of your B-string sci-fi movies that hit the pike—even better in some ways than others, because everything was very clear, yet very mysterious, and there was a lot of subtlety going. But then what happens in TV (just like in comics) is that once you get the main product out of the way, it goes to the production companies. And the production companies farm it out to whatever hack is sitting around the office.

HOWELL: So many sausages.

MANTLO: Yeah. They're given a budget of let's say—let's pick a figure out of a hat—$500,000 to produce each show, right? Immediately the production company—they either get a kickback, or they skim two or three hundred thousand for their expenses or whatever, their Rolls Royces, their pools, their mistresses. The other $200,000 goes into producing a shitty hour show that's going to die in six months, and everybody's involved in the corruption, so the next time they just do it all over again. They produce a solid pilot, and then the show is garbage when it hits circulation. I think comics have been unfortunately caught up in that syndrome at times: you get two issues of *BRAVE AND THE BOLD* that knock your eyes out, and then it'll go to a second-rate team for the run of the book, or *"Nick Fury"* will start out Jack Kirby and Stan Lee, and within a few issues it's become Frank Springer and Gary Friedrich or whoever else is around. Because essentially there's some people around who create brilliance, y'know? Stan comes in and does an issue of *SHE-HULK* that I thought was wonderful, and then pffft! out the tubes with little crabbed panels and scrawny-looking people having all sorts of problems in every panels. Stan's genius was that he picked one problem per issue and stuck with it (laughter). He didn't overwhelm you. I mean, you look at Stan and John's *SHE-HULK* story—three-panel pages, four-panel pages—you look at *SHE-HULK* today, there's eight panels per page, and you can't tell who the hell's doing what or you no longer care. So anyway, the same syndrome applies in comics. With *MAN FROM ATLANTIS*, I tried to keep the original feeling of *MAN FROM ATLANTIS*. I tried to have him looking for his roots (which they *never* touched again in the TV show) and to keep the science fiction aspect of it which they totally dropped because it was too expensive to do science fiction on TV shows. In a sense, if you look at most shows, they all happen in Los Angeles within two blocks of the studio, and *MAN FROM ATLANTIS* went from swimming in the ocean to swimming in a pool, because it was cheaper to film. So somehow, with those two books, I got identified—people liked what I was doing. Archie and Shooter like what I was doing there, so I got identified with the oddball stuff. As a result, when I went in and proposed *THE METALLOIDS* (which is what I thought *THE MICRONAUTS* were called at the time, because my son had torn up the wrapping paper), Jim said, "This sounds like a good project for Bill..."

HOWELL: It's weird.

MANTLO: Mego agreed for a chunk of money to let us do it, and the toys were flooding the markets, and there was a million-dollar ad campaign, and so as "the offbeat writer," I was told, "Go ahead and do that." As the "offbeat writer" I was told, "Go ahead and do *HOWARD THE DUCK*," also because nobody else would touch it, being in such awe of Steve Gerber's brilliance.

And as the "the offbeat writer," I was given *ROM*. Don't ask me where it came from, but I actually prefer doing that stuff to doing the mainstream books. I don't mind doing an issue of *THOR* now and then or an issue of, oh, maybe *FANTASTIC FOUR*, or an issue of *CAPTAIN AMERICA*. I wouldn't want to do any of them on a regular basis. The only mainstream characters I at all enjoy doing regularly are *THE HULK* and *SPIDER-MAN*.

HOWELL: Let's talk about Iron Man, speaking of mainstream characters you didn't enjoy doing.

MANTLO: Out of left field comes a question.

HOWELL: Your tenure on *IRON MAN* marked a number of significant deviations from what the series had been up until that point. You expanded quite a bit on Mike Friedrich's "Let's get Tony Stark socially aware..." tendencies.

MANTLO: Did I? Is that true? I don't think so, but go ahead.

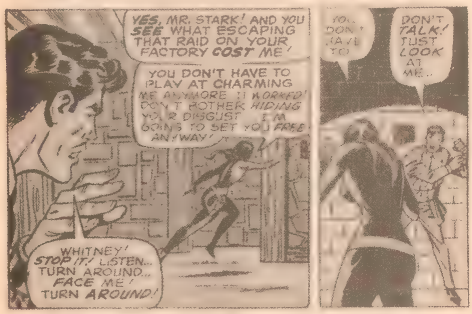
HOWELL: Friedrich started moving Stark out of armaments and out of being a cardboard capitalist.

MANTLO: My exposure to *IRON MAN* was Stan and Jack and Gene Colan. I don't remember who came on after them. When Archie started writing it it was maybe 1968, 1969, 1970—in there, and again, after I'd stopped reading. I stopped reading after the string of "Adam Austin" stories, and didn't come back to *IRON MAN* until I wrote it, so I missed *all* of Archie's stuff, *all* of Mike Friedrich's stuff,

and all of anybody else in between. To this day I couldn't tell you who wrote it, other than Stan and Archie. To be quite honest with you I wouldn't know which issues came when. When I took over the book, I guess my exposure to it in the office was that Stark was out of armaments and into social concern. Y'know, his liberal conscience was bothering him. That had already been set up, and from sitting there pasting balloons in the book, this is what I gathered was going on.

A very funny story, a very funny aside: one of the first mistakes I made at Marvel, my first week of work, I was sitting there with the flu, and trying not to show I had the flu, because I didn't want to go out sick in my first week, and a job rolls across my desk with Iron Man, and he had a nose. And I'm looking at this book and thinking "Jesus Christ, I must be *hallucinating*! Iron Man doesn't have a *nose*." So I sat there, very innocently, with a tube of white-out, and *painted out all* the noses, and maybe an hour later, I hear screaming, "Esposito, are you out of your mind?! *What happened to his nose*?" And I said, "Oh Jesus. They gave him a nose while I was out (laughter) looking for work—and this is it, I'm fired, I took off his nose," and Mike comes in and he's raging "God damn it, the nose is there!! You can see the little dot of white over each nose!" So I was holding my breath, waiting for them to come down to me, and I said, "John, give me the stuff, and I'll scrape the white-out off of every single nose."

So what I'm trying to say is I knew nothing about *IRON MAN*, until I started writing it. All I knew was that he was no longer into armaments, that he had changed Stark Industries to Stark International. The best way to find out what happened in a book is to take over the book and realize that you don't know who the villains are, 'cause you go back looking for the villains. Now I had read up through the Colan stuff, so I didn't need to read that. I had


YES, MR. STARK! AND YOU SEE WHAT ESCAPING THAT RAID ON YOUR FACTORY COST ME!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO PLAY AT CHARMING ME ANYMORE !! I WORKED! DON'T BOTHER HIDING YOUR DISGUST! I'M GOING TO SET YOU FREE AND AWAY!
WHITNEY! STOP IT! LISTEN... TURN AROUND... FACE ME! TURN AROUND!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO
DON'T TALK! JUST LOOK AT ME...

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"I had to pick up with Archie's...stuff—and I was *very* impressed."

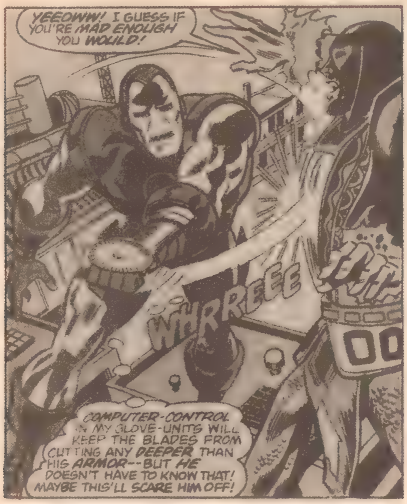
to pick up with Archie's and Johnny Craig's stuff—and I was *very* impressed. I thought those were great stories. Here was Midas, and his muffler, and Madame Masque—I wanted to bring those back, but I had two or three issues of Ultimo, knocking over things like the Washington Monument [*#95*]—all sorts of weird shit, *and* I had George Tuska to work with. So I wanted to do stories more like the stuff Stan and Gene did, more like the stuff Archie and Johnny did. I wanted to make Stark more human, because there's nothing more boring than a cardboard character to script every issue. He comes up, he presents himself, he makes his statement, he doesn't develop. There was an incredible scene in one of Archie's stories where he kisses Madame Masque [#19], and that was the last time we ever saw that happen, so I wanted to come back to that. Here was a nice relationship: he's stuck in his armor, she's stuck in a mask. So there I was spinning what I thought were really nice stories, but there's such a—you talk about a credibility gap, you sit there and do a plot, and then you see what it looks like when George Tuska sends it back. You go from power to pedestrianism, from super-science and the way Perez or Starlin or even Layton draws Iron Man, with all the sheen and the glitter, to George, where it looks like he's wearing a clay suit. You tell George, "Now he picks up this super truck, and he throws it at a wall," and here's Iron Man picking up a garbage truck and throwing it at a crummy brick wall—this is *supposed* to be the *biggest* goddamn factory in the *world*, the most *sophisticated* factory in the world, and George is drawing it with oil drums leaking, and granite block construction. It was constant frustration. Here I am trying to do something with this book, to take Iron Man out of just being the second-string character with a nose, and I was being frustrated by George at every turn. And then suddenly George went to DC, and I got *Carmine Infantino* doing what I thought was a *brilliant* job, and Keith Giffen doing what I thought was an *excellent* job, and suddenly I was off the book.

I don't to this day understand what I was doing wrong with *IRON MAN*, except that maybe I handled Tony Stark as a little too liberally-conscious, but again, that was an extrapolation of what I was told he was into. I don't see that much difference...characterization-wise, I don't see that much difference between what I was doing and what Michelinie is doing, as far as Tony Stark's personality.

HOWELL: I see a vast difference in the Madame Masque character.

MANTLO: True, but I have not read his Madame Masque character. What I didn't like there is part and parcel of what I was saying before, is I built up to something, only to have it dumped, because New Writer comes on the book, New Writer's inclination is to throw out whatever has gone before, and start all over, start fresh. I've been guilty of it. The first thing I did in *FRANKENSTEIN* was blow up Doug's villains. (Laughter) I forget what they're called, it was some weird spy agency that was following the stupid monster around the Alps. In my first issue, I think the first page was "*BOOM!* There goes the helicopter and the villains. A light goes out on a control panel somewhere..." and we're through with this story-line. So I'm guilty of it as everyone else, yet what I do is go home and go "Goddamn it, I knew where I wanted to take this story, and David has dumped it." But conversely, I've dumped Doug's or someone else's and I can't think off-hand of books I've picked up after other people. I probably dumped Gerry's, when I took over *IRON MAN*.

IRON MAN being my first "major character" book, I


YEEOWWW! I GUESS IF YOU'RE MAD ENOUGH YOU WOULD!
WHRREEE
COMPUTER-CONTROL OF MY GLOVE-UNITS WILL KEEP THE BLADES FROM CUTTING ANY DEEPER THAN THIS ARMOR--BUT HE DOESN'T HAVE TO KNOW THAT! MAYBE THIS'LL SCARE HIM OFF!

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wanted to put my stamp on it. I no longer feel that way. Honestly, I'm not stroking here, or patting myself on the back. What's important to me now is the continuity of the character. I'm trying less to make statements with the books—where I consciously tried to make social statements with a number of my early books, I'm not doing that any more. I'm letting the characters speak for themselves, I'm trying to explore the characters *as* characters. In many cases, I've written stories where people will come up to me and say, "This is diametrically opposed to what you wrote earlier." I think the *"Soviet Super-Soldiers"* is a case in point. I tried to write as if I were in the characters' heads. That is, as if these characters had things that *they* had to say, and I think the story came out that way, rather than me imposing my viewpoint or my politics or my social perspective on anything. Now I'm trying more to have the characters inter-react in a universe that's been created around them, and my control over that, if any, is that I create part of that universe, so that I can control those interactions. But still, the Hulk is more the Hulk than he is me now. Even in the beginning I was trying to write him, not my way, not Stan's way, not Roger's way, not Len's way, but *his* way. What is this character, what does he want and, how does he go about getting it? And I decided that the overriding desire in The Hulk's life was for peace, just wanting to be left alone. He's not the kind of character who's going to go out and conquer America, or fight super-villains for its own sake. He just wants to be left alone, and if anything interferes with that, then he turns green and smashes them.

KALISH: From your description of some of the changes in the working environment, the current environment might not be ideal, but a lot of the difficulties seem to have been resolved, in terms of the hierarchy system being pretty much eliminated.

"Here I am trying to do something with this book...and I was being frustrated by George [Tuska] at every turn."

MANTLO: Yeah. I'd say that the difference between what's going on now and what was going on then is that every time you walked up to Marvel five years ago you'd see a lot of lean and hungry people waiting to stab you on the Senate steps to get your books. Under Jim, the Brutuses, the Caesars, the Antonys have all be relegated to their proper positions. There is a hierarchy in that there is an editor-in-chief, an editor, and writers and artists. And we know the chain of command and everybody follows it. Nobody is writing *THE HULK* because he's a senior writer, nobody's got first dibs on *SPIDER-MAN* because he happens to be the editor-in-chief. I mean, technically Jim could write *SPIDER-MAN* if he wanted to, but the purpose of a goddamn editor-in-chief is not to sit there and type *SPIDER-MAN* all day, and that they're doing it right. You're an overseer, you're a prime director, you're the Watcher, y'know? You make sure we're doing it right.

KALISH: New meaning for Omniversal Theory.

MANTLO: Yeah. I mean, Jesus, we have to touch base somewhere, or else the twenty of us would be out there weaving fantasies that eventually devolved into nothing, because we wouldn't have any benchmark to touch on—and that's Jim's purpose. Through the editors, that's communicated to us. Before, it was Mindless City. You didn't know who was in charge, you didn't know what wind was going to change what policy one day from the next—and I don't really fault the individuals involved because nobody could do the job. Nobody could handle creativity, continuity, and cash. And that's what the editors were being asked to do. They were to watch the budget, to be creative consultants on all the books, and to be writing the books themselves. And it was Marvel's, I guess, or Cadence's way of keeping down the overhead. Jim has fought for higher overheads every year, to the point where now we are the best-paid comic book professionals in the business. Things are happening that we've been screaming for for years, y'know, residuals for overseas reprints, everything that would give you some kind of pride in your craft, Jim has fought for and won. Whereas before, the editor was told, "Shut your mouth, go write *SPIDER-MAN*. You've got yours. Let everybody else scramble for theirs." And I think Jim has done away with all that. I would say almost categorically that there is no back-stabbing at Marvel, and there has been none since Jim took over, or none that has been allowed to reach any kind of fatal results for one person or another. Whereas before there was constant bickering and constant gossip, to undermine someone so you could take his stuff. And that was debilitating for everybody.

HOWELL: Let's talk about *ROM*.

BUT THE WOMAN, THE SAME BEING HE FIRST ENCOUNTERED UPON HIS ARRIVAL, HAS NOT TAKEN FLIGHT!
THERE IS MUCH ABOUT THE BEHAVIOR OF HER FELLOW HUMANS THAT ROM MUST ERROR.
THE WOMAN SHALL EXPLAIN!
W-WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME? WHY DID YOU SAVE ME FROM CRASHING BUT THERE ON THE ROAD
AND THEN COME HERE AND MURDER, IN COLD BLOOD, TWO MEN I'VE KNOWN ALL MY LIFE!?
W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING? N NO! PLEASE! I I MUST HAVE BEEN INSANE, TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOU!
YOU'RE A MURDERER! A MONSTER! DON'T TOUCH ME! EEEEE...!
AT THAT MOMENT, ELSEWHERE IN CLAIRTON:
BUT I'M TELLING YOU I AM AARON BRADFORD OF CLAIRTON! NO, I HAVEN'T BEEN DRINKING! THAT'S RIGHT, A ROBOT! A BIG ROBOT! HE'S INVADED MY TOWN! KILLED TWO PEOPLE ALREADY!
LOOK, WHY DON'T WE JUST TALK IN THE MORNING, OR NOT?

"It became kind of like an amalgam of all those old 1950s movies, *THEM* and *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*..."

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MANTLO: ROM is a neat book. "Golly-gee, peachy-keen." All my 1950s expletives. Jim said, "We're gonna do another toy book, and you're the toy writer." (Laughter)

HOWELL: Wind-up writer.

MANTLO: Right, and he said, "Come on in, look at this videotape," they did the same thing as with *THE HUMAN FLY*, we took the videotape out of the box, put it in the Betamax, and what do we see? This weird-looking robot in swirling mists, and this voice-over saying, "The Dire Wraiths from the supernatural galaxy are going to get Rom the robot," and I said, "Oh, that's kind of neat, it's not what I expected." The robot looked stupid as hell, but then I saw John Romita's preliminary sketches for him, where he softened the lines, and extended him, and took away his monkey-wrench head (laughter), made a nice visual, and we did that three page thing of Rom crashing to Earth to take back to Parker Brothers, and they loved it. Then I went home and wrote up a proposal that was fucked up. It was Rom landing in England, and it had mysticism, and witchcraft, and shit, and Jim said, "This stinks," and threw it out the window, and he, in effect, plotted the first issue...

HOWELL: He put it in West Virginia?

MANTLO: No, I put it in West Virginia, and I had Brandy and the car bit, and what Jim did was take the origin of the Spaceknights business, and basically rewrote the Silver Surfer's origin. And I said, "Ah, shit, not this stuff again," and I wrote it, and for four issues I kinda went along, going, "Oh, Silver Surfer. This turkey's going to die," and suddenly I started getting into it. The Wraiths became more supernatural as I was playing with them, I realized there was a lot more I could do with them. I liked the mood of the book. I liked the fact that this guy, with penlight battery eyes was walking around on Earth, and that somebody loved him, or thought she loved him, and that these weird ghostly creatures were after him, and everybody else, and it became kind of like an amalgam of all these old 1950s movies, *THEM* and *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, and all those movies I grew up with. I can still remember hiding under my bed during *PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE*. And that's the mood I wanted to get across, that there's somebody out there—it could be anybody—and they're going to *get you*, unless Rom (who's the only one that can see them), against overwhelming odds, succeeds in eradicating them. This turnabout on my part, by the way, is all thanks to Jo Duffy, who I think is one of the most incredible people at Marvel. She cares passionately, she's witty and concise in her opinions, and has a very instinctive plot grasp that really kept me on *ROM*, even when it looked grimmest; there was a whole spate of issues, I think #13, 14, and 15, that were drudgery. I didn't know what I wanted to do, I wasn't sure where to handle it, and Jo kept pulling me back, and saying, "This is a good book, and you stay on it, 'cause you're the best writer for it." And then it clicked, with the wedding sequence...

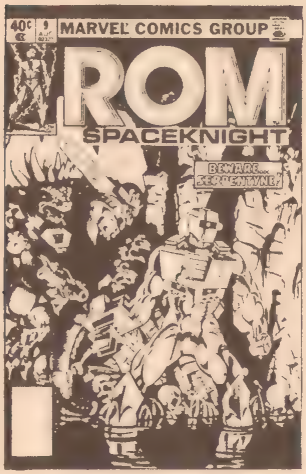
KALISH: And it showed, too.

MANTLO: And it showed. Wow. That book took off, right? I mean, you had the Wraith marrying Brandy, and Rom showing up to kill the groom... (Laughter)

KALISH: And then the real groom showing up...

MANTLO: And it really started to move—and I can't explain why—but suddenly, every issue became a pleasure. Sal was calling me up! Sal is the ultimate professional, who just sits there and draws and collects his

"I said, 'Here's a book that is suddenly becoming a top-notch book. Nobody has touched it but me and Sal, so nobody else can claim the credit."



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paycheck, but he was calling me up, saying "I like this story, let's do more like this," and "This is great!" and throwing ideas at me, and it began to be the old Bullpen I'd heard about. We'd talk out stories, we'd bounce ideas off each other. And I went in and said, "Al, I've got this idea in mind. I want to take Rom back to Galador, and find out that even though it's still paradise, he can't stay there. But it's going to involve Galactus, and I know there's proprietary interests..." And Allen, who had taken over the editorship when Jo moved to *EPIC*, said, "Do it! What do we care? Use Galactus. So what if Byrne's writing *FANTASTIC FOUR* now. This book's just as important," and that was really what clicked it. Somebody said, "This book is just as important." It was like the first time in my many years at Marvel, that any book I'd worked on, became as good as the top book in an editor's eyes. And Allen is good in that way, because he treats them all equally. There's no distinction. You're not God if you're writing or drawing *FANTASTIC FOUR* or *THE X-MEN*. *ROM* could be just as good—and apparently is selling better—than a lot of them. And that really got me going. I said, "Here's a book that is suddenly becoming a top-notch book. Nobody has touched it but me and Sal, so nobody else can claim the credit. We're doing it, and we're doing it our way, and it's working and everybody likes it," and Milgrom started coming through with some of the most astonishing covers I've ever seen. I don't know if you saw the newest one, with the red cover and The Torpedo? That one knocked me for a loop. Al is a great support. And Sal...! The man is a pleasure to work with: he's professional, the stuff is there when you need it, it's right, there's a minimum of changes that need to be made, and you look at the stuff he's doing on *ROM*, it's...he's got the grandeur and sweep that Kirby had in some of his stuff, he's got the imagination going in the sci-fi elements, he's got the mystery going in the mystery elements—he's caught it, every facet of it, all the way down the line, and it's showing. That book, because the two of us care so much, is taking off, and Allen is just breaking his back, doing covers that nobody at Marvel has ever seen before. Just these really stunning, poster-like covers. The one following the Torpedo has the Rocketeers coming in to Clairton, and it's like an invasion of locusts. There's little black dots on the horizon, and the church spire in the background, and then The Rocketeers are here. And he's caught the mood I want. There'd be Fifties-type citizens going to school, and going to the office, and the mom, the pop, the grocer... and that feeling just clicked right into place. I don't know how old you guys are; I'm almost thirty, so I grew up in the 1950s...

HOWELL: We missed most of those years.

MANTLO: Okay, but I grew up in the 1950s, when you had that kind of feeling: the milkman brought the milk, and smiled to the mother, and the cat licked the cream (laughter)...the Eisenhower years. I look back on it now, and it's clear that it was as much a fantasy as everybody said it was. All the movies showed it very accurately—the hamburgers, and barbecues in the back yard, and the 2.5 kids in the split level houses. It was real. And that's what we're trying to get back to in *ROM*, is that kind of fantasy/reality, in which suddenly this alien drops, and the Communists, or The Wraiths or whatever...

HOWELL: It's a real pleasure, and something distinctly different at Marvel, to have a series that's set in a small town with small-town people who behave that way.

MANTLO: MICRONAUTS, as you recall, was set in Florida, originally. Same with *ROM* in West Virginia. Anyone else I create will probably be somewhere else.

HOWELL: I thought it was a nice touch, in the last ROM, by the way, where The Torpedo's family moves to town, and everybody comes out and welcomes them, just like a small town.

MANTLO: Just like a small town, and also, just like a small town that has had half its population go up in smoke.

HOWELL: Well, I don't know if that's typical or not (laughter)

MANTLO: No, but I'm saying, if you caught the line, she says...

KALISH: "Real People!"

MANTLO: Real people, right?

HOWELL: That's funny. (Laughter)

KALISH: What I really wonder was The Torpedo's family didn't even pick up that...

MANTLO: Didn't even pick it up, right?

KALISH: "Wait a moment. You have non-real people?"

HOWELL: You mentioned reaching your readers through Marvel. Who do you think your readers are? Can you

classify them at all?

MANTLO: I would like to think that my readers are seven or eight years old, fifth or sixth grade, or whatever grade you're in when you're seven or eight, fourth grade, even, that they're wandering around looking for something to do, beyond baseball cards, they walk into a newsstand and they see a colorful cover, and they pick it up and they like what they read inside the colorful cover, and *what* they read, while part of a greater continuity, is crystal clear, concise and exciting, entertaining, action-packed, intriguing, maybe educational. Then they're caught, the way I was caught. I mean, I read comics off and on. I'd pick up an *ARCHIE* here or a *RICHIE RICH* there, or a *HOUSE OF MYSTERY*, and they were nice. I read them in the barber shop, and when I was a kid growing up, and the covers were missing, and even with the cover and the first five pages missing, you still knew exactly what was going on in a "*Superman*" story. There was no sense of coming back next month for the next one, because every one was a totality unto itself. Then *JUSTICE LEAGUE* hit. I remember walking into the store, seeing this copy of something called *BRAVE AND THE BOLD*, with a bunch of characters running around a big starfish, and I was hooked immediately. That goddamn story—which I don't remember for the life of me now, and all these characters who I was only dimly aware of—caught me body and soul, and I cherished the goddamn thing, and I read it until it crumbled into little bits and looked like oatmeal. I was going "Wow! This is phenomenal! This is great stuff!" And lo and behold, there it was again, next month, or two months later. It wasn't just a shot in the dark, or a flash in the pan. Every month, I got the impression, I could come back and pick this up, and as a result I started looking for *THE FLASH*, and I guess *WONDER WOMAN* and *HAWKMAN*, and whoever was around...

HOWELL: GREEN LANTERN...

MANTLO: GREEN LANTERN. Characters I was not really too aware of. I mean, we're talking about limited resources. My allowance was a quarter. I could buy two comic books and a pack of baseball cards. But suddenly I was working to buy comic books; doing odd jobs and stuff, to get the entire universe, the entire peripheral orbit that revolved around this book called *JUSTICE LEAGUE*. And then one day, in the course of looking for one of them, I walked in, and there was *SPIDER-MAN #4* or *5*, the "*Sandman*" issue...

HOWELL: Four.

MANTLO: ...on the stands, and it was a toss-up. Here I was, *GREEN LANTERN* in one hand and *SPIDER-MAN* in the other hand; and for some reason I chose the *SPIDER-MAN*, and that was even more incredible. That really blew me away, because not only did you have a character that had some kind of internal order going on in his series but the goddamn guy was making *jokes*, and he wasn't holding up the solution on the last page, as *JUSTICE LEAGUE* seemed to be doing. There was even a *JUSTICE LEAGUE* story I remember where a reader sent in a story that they had to get out of, and they're trapped inside a cavern, and Snapper Carr is holding up the artwork (laughter)...

HOWELL: Oh, right. You know who that was?

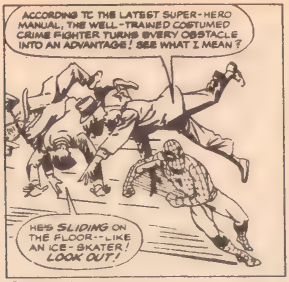
MANTLO: No.

HOWELL: It actually wasn't a real submitted story, as I remember. They made it up as a framing device—a story the reader sent in, and the reader was somebody named Jerry Thomas, which was a composite name of Jerry Bails and Roy Thomas.

MANTLO: (Loud snort of laughter) Okay. All right, so anyway, here I was with *SPIDER-MAN*, and this really got me, because he was wise-cracking, and he was insecure and skinny and wore glasses, and hey, who did that sound like? There I was, skinny, didn't wear glasses yet, but was working towards it by reading every day, and really, that was a great paradigm for my existence at that time, and it hooked me so that the next month, I was buying *SPIDER-MAN*, and then a couple of months later I saw *DAREDEVIL*, which I only bought because Spider-Man was on the cover, on the first issue.

HOWELL: Aha! So that works!

MANTLO: Of course—when you're that age (maybe we're talking about nine at that point). Then I started tracing and drawing, and copying everything in sight, and creating comic books of my own; I think they were called *CONGO COMICS*, because I was the only white kid in an all-black junior high school, and this was my way of keeping myself from being beaten up. I would take all the kids in the class who were bigger than me and draw them into the book, and they were so flattered that rather than beat me up, they came over to read the comics (laughter). And that was kind of interesting, because here through comic books I was getting respect. But I was not getting anywhere else, and the teacher pushed me to go to [The School of] Art and Design, which I'd never heard of, and didn't even know where Manhattan was. So in effect, that interest in comics took me out of the boondocks, and put me in the big city, and here I am today. But what I'm saying is that if a comic book can do that to a kid, if it can take his whole life, and move it, then there's something magic, worth preserving about *that kind* of a comic book. That's the kind of comics I want to write; that'll take a seven-year-old kid, or an eight-year-old kid, get him off his ass, get him away from the TV, make him think, make him believe that once again, yes, there's something good about being alive, something exciting about being alive, and something better than driving a truck from here to Seattle for a living. And as I grew, Marvel grew. I went from drawing comics, crazy little comics that were essentially ripoffs of *THE AVENGERS* with my own heroes, but Marvel didn't stop there. They didn't stop at Zemo and his Masters of Evil. By the time I hit high school, they were up there with The Silver Surfer and the Inhumans and—Jesus, we used to save our lunch money to buy the stuff and read it at lunch, because it was more of the same magic, and it was growing with us. And Parker was in his last year of high school when we were in our last year of high school, and that was really neat. And that's what I want to write for: I want to write *THE HULK* so it can be picked up by the seven-year-old and get him off his can, that it also can be read by a twenty-year-old who's in the middle of exams, that it can make a high school kid look up from geography, and think that, "Jesus, there must be something to life," something really colorful awaiting them. If he can just finish this, he'll get to the comic, and be inspired by it to go back to that. I can remember stupid bits of fact out of Gardner Fox stories that are so phenomenal, y'know, like if you open your mouth, your fillings can pick up radio signals. They used to put on these little dumb tidbits that stick in your head, because you're at that age. I get letters today, saying that "If it hadn't been for *MICRONAUTS*, I would have failed my spelling test—you put in this word, which..." and I get a lot of these. "You're not talking down to me. You're not making me feel as stupid as everybody says I am. You're telling me that life is great and exciting and important, and that it takes effort, that it's not easy and I have to work a


ACCORDING TO THE LATEST SUPER-HERO MANUAL, THE WELL-TRAINED COSTUMED CRIME FIGHTER TURNS EVERY OBSTACLE INTO AN ADVANTAGE! SEE WHAT I MEAN?
HE'S SLIDING ON THE FLOOR--LIKE AN ICE-SKATER! LOOK OUT!

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"...not only did you have a character that had some kind of internal order going on in his series, but the goddam guy was making *jokes*..."

little bit, but I'm willing to do that because you're willing to go along with me." That's what a comic book should be. Comic books should not be tedious and overwrought and overdrawn and panels going crazy all over the place so they look like wallpaper—I'm sorry, that's a Jim Shooter simile, but I subscribe to it. You should be able to follow the flow of a comic book from page 1 to page 21, you should care passionately about the characters, you should know that they're in danger, you should know that they're capable of overcoming the danger because they're the toughest ones there are in the entire universe, and they should overcome it at the end of the book. You shouldn't be cheated out of that. Life is a series of little triumphs and little despairs, and you should get all that in a comic book. And you shouldn't end the goddamn story going "Hunh?" or "Tune in next issue to find out what went on this issue." And I think that a lot of those excesses started to come out about the time I lost interest in comics. There was a lot of experimentation that I loved like, some Steranko stuff, but remember, I was a comics sophisticate. I was somebody whom comics put into art school. I studied with Bernie Krigstein, and I was geared to look at the stuff and make sense of it. But even then I could sense the interest of the kids slipping, behind me. Kids were not paying attention to comics, because who the hell wanted to buy two comics to put together a four-page splash by Jim Steranko? Nobody! Especially at 35¢ a crack. It was different when they were 10 or 12 cents, but now we're talking about double the price, and you've got to buy two to make sense of this crazy drawing? And after that, I totally lost interest. McGregor was gone somewhere in The Twilight Zone with "*The Black Panther*" and "*Killraven*," and to this day I probably couldn't figure them out. Jim Starlin was doing some interesting stuff in *CAPTAIN MARVEL*, but it was an issue-by-issue thing: if it made sense this issue you were lucky; if it didn't make sense next issue, too bad.

I thought Jack Kirby was the ultimate story-teller, and the ultimate comics genius. I used to sit in his house in Long Island and watch him draw—with my mouth open—and that was great, but then Jack did something that has stuck in my mind and has been very revealing. It was like a seminal moment in my experience with comic books. Jack took a page of *THOR* that he'd just spent twenty minutes on, twenty minutes, for a page of *THOR*, right? (Laughter) Most people do two pages a day now, but Jack turned out five in maybe the two hours I was there one day. He looked at it and he said "Stan would never accept this," and handed it to this friend of mine, who was a better artist than I was, and was really the one who should have had the page, and I said, "Well, this man has just rejected a page of his own art, without ever showing it to Stan Lee, without ever waiting for Stan to reject it, he knows that this does not tell a story." And at that point I think that I was already a writer. I was more interested in writing the stuff and in telling the story than I was in drawing it. That's stuck in my head ever since, because to get an artist to reject a page now you practically have to fire the guy. And I think what happened with Jack, and the whole comic book mentality, is that people got tired. There was a limited number of time in which to produce their material, and unlimited number of pages for the ever-expanding number of books—people got tired of putting in top effort on their own initiative. That, I think, came to a head when Jack went to DC. This is the supreme story-teller suddenly deciding he's going to "write his own," right? Prior to this, he had the *idea*, at least, that Stan Lee was sitting on top of him. Without ever seeing it, he knew that Stan Lee was going to say that this was wrong. That was gone. Jack was now, "DC HAS KIRBY!" He was going to write his own stuff—and the mistakes were horrible! They were like *COMICS WRITING 1*. Characters were introduced, then forgotten about. Situations were developed, then forgotten about. You lost all reason—I mean, there was no internal reason for what was going on in *THE NEW GODS*, or *THE FOREVER PEOPLE*, or...there was some dim quest at the end of it, and another god, another irresolute ending, which in all books of that kind generally never come to fruition because the writer has run it into the ground before he's gotten there. The book has been cancelled before he gets there. So all the faults that he knew Stan would oversee, Jack was putting into the book, and I think you see it very clearly in *THE ETERNALS*. Finally, when Jack comes back to Marvel, he puts a 300-foot character standing in Jamaica Bay or whatever the hell it is, and *nobody notices*. For *ten* goddamn issues, nobody says a word about this 300-foot giant. Like Jim says, "New Yorkers are willing to accept a lot," but come on! What happened with the writers and the artists is that they got brief shots at brilliant visuals or great concepts, and they forgot the totality of the story. Stan was a master of the totality—the greater visuals took second place. If there was one there that issue, great. If you could have The Silver Surfer, or The Watcher, or Galactus, great. If not, you told the goddamn story first, and the other stuff was icing on the cake. Jack went for all the icing, and forgot the cake. I think a lot of Marvel writers in that period patterned their work after Stan's excesses, the idea of writing a story without ever knowing how it's going to end—and that was more of the icing on the cake. You never got anything but icing after that. I

would say, almost categorically, from 1969 to 1975 or 1976, many of the books were being written that way. Y'know, "What's going to happen next issue?" "I dunno." That was especially grim if somebody else had to take over in midstream, because the writer decided now was the time to get out of this and go on to greatness...

HOWELL: When it was time for the ending.

MANTLO: Yeah. And I think I was maybe guilty of this, when I was learning. I'd say I was guilty of many of these same excesses up until 1977, 1978—so we're talking about three years ago. At that point Jim came in, and he said, "One issue stories," and I didn't understand, because Marvel *was* the *epic*, Marvel *was* the six-issue continued story. But gradually, I began to understand what he was saying. He didn't want DC stories, although he tends to make it sound that way, having been trained by Mort Weisinger himself.

HOWELL: I grew up reading the DC stories and I don't consider the concept of a DC story—however unattractively Shooter or whomever might describe it—as something that's constricting.

MANTLO: Understand that there's two kinds of a DC story. There's the *GREEN LANTERN, FLASH*, maybe some of the late 1960s *DETECTIVE*...

HOWELL: JUSTICE LEAGUE?

MANTLO: Yeah. They were different than the stories in which Jimmy Olsen sitting in an electric chair in an issue, watching his hair puff up, or *SUPERMAN* (which to this day has very little continuity from one issue to the next, although it's changed, I gather, from the one or two issues I've read). I mean, obviously *FLASH* and *GREEN LANTERN* changed radically as a result of Marvel. I mean, before you had those great Gil Kane and Carmine Infantino stories—I always forget writers, which is odd—

HOWELL: You mean the old days?

MANTLO: The mid-1960s stuff.

HOWELL: I guess that would be John Broome or Gardner Fox.

MANTLO: Okay, you had a sense that every issue you would meet the character, get involved in an adventure, and nothing much would happen beyond that. Obviously that's different now, Iris Allen dies—is that her name, Iris Allen?

KALISH: It was.

MANTLO: Things are happening at DC as a direct result of Marvel. I think what you're seeing now is DC's attempt to be Marvel, ten years later. What Jim, I think, is talking about when he says "one issue stories," is the period at DC, the John Broome, Gardner Fox period, of solid, exciting stories, yet with the addition of the Marvel continuity. There's nothing wrong with continuing sub-plots from one issue to the next; all he's asking for is that you beat up the goddamn villain in one or two issues at most—if it's three you damn well better have a reason for having him around that long—and that the characters act like the characters, they don't wimp out. Y'know, that they become heroes again. That's as opposed to what happened to Marvel when stories would stretch on endlessly with second-rate villains, or first-rate villains who became second-rate by frequent appearance. I began to realize, when I took over *THE HULK*, when I started doing *ROM*, that Jim was right—that I liked doing one issue stories, that I liked coming up with scenes, cover scenes, and then building a story around it, which is the way some DC editor (I was once told) worked.

HOWELL: Julius Schwartz.

MANTLO: In *JUSTICE LEAGUE* apparently, they would

"...I was constantly told, 'Get them back to Earth...'"
AND THE PRINCESS IS RIDING ON IT!
DON'T WORRY COMMANDER! I'LL CALM HER DOWN IN A MINUTE--
AND PUT HER ON THE SCENT! FOLLOW US!
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do that. Michael Golden and I were talking about doing that with *THE MICRONAUTS*, where we'd come up with a cover scene, and then build a story around it. *MICRONAUTS*, I think, is my worst case, is guilty of the most excesses, and I think is showing serious lapses in sales because of that. I think I'm losing the *kids*—the very kids I want to hold, the seven-to-fifteen-year-olds. I'm losing my younger audience, by making *THE MICRONAUTS* too convoluted and too confusing, but I don't think I'm fully at fault in that. I had a concept of *THE MICRONAUTS* that I wanted very strongly to pursue, which was a group of people in their own universe, exploring their own universe, and I was constantly told, "Get them back to Earth, little people in a big setting," by Jim, who wants a kid to be able to pick up the Micronaut toys and re-enact the comic, in their living room.

KALISH: An interesting concept.

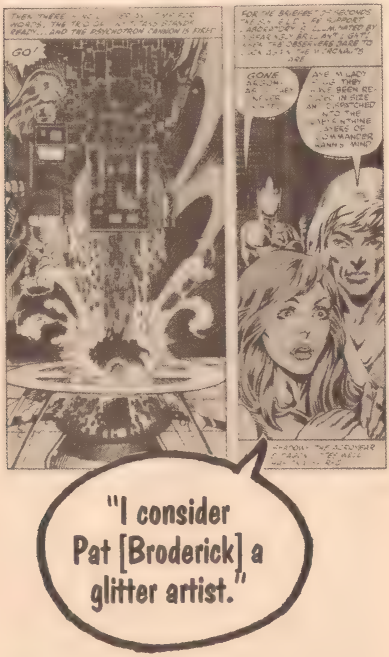
MANTLO: Yeah, and I agree it's an interesting concept, and it's exciting for four or five issues, but there I feel it peters out. If you go back and look at the progression of *THE MICRONAUTS*, it was the Micronauts, five or six issues on Earth, back to the Microverse, five or six issues on Earth, back to the Microverse, and it became a never-ending storyline, because every time I got heavy into the Microverse, they wanted 'em back on Earth...

HOWELL: I can recall Jim telling me that he thinks the reader loses a point of reference if too much happens that isn't on a familiar setting.

MANTLO: He may be thoroughly right. In the case of *ROM* and *THE HULK*, I agree with him whole-heartedly. I will not have either character off Earth for long, or in another dimension for long. But *THE MICRONAUTS* I thought was something different. I had no objection to having them on Earth, I didn't want it to become a ritual, y'know, here, there, here, there. I wanted it to be like an organic progression. What was happening, though, was that betwen Michael and I, in the early stages, we got totally in over our heads. We asked for a three-month grace period to start the book; Michael had just finished pencilling the first issue when they told us it was scheduled. Immediately the hammer came down, Michael was...

KALISH: You were already late.

MANTLO: We were already late, and we were struggling to catch up. The book became more confusing as we were turning out plots bi-weekly instead of monthly. Michael got tired, Michael left. He got tired of hearing how confusing his art was. He changed his art style with issue 7, tried to go very Kirby, which is what I kept asking him to do. I thought it was great. I was having a ball writing Michael Golden looking like Jack Kirby. Michael hated every minute of it, wanted out, and finally left the book with issue 12. He only last week told me he thinks those were the best issues he did. He learned in those twelve issues—but it took him a certain amount of pride and stubbornness to be overcome—to realize that this is what a good comic book is. This is what a good story-telling job is, and I could have told him that two years ago, but he didn't stick around to wait. But then the Microverse didn't work under Chaykin. The magic was gone. So I brought them back to Earth under Broderick. Broderick, who would have been perfect for the Microverse stuff, was lousy on the Earth stuff because he didn't want to draw the size relationships. I consider Pat a glitter artist. Like, you looked at the *ROM ANNUAL* pages*, and went "Wow! this is *ROM* we're seeing here? This is the best stuff." True, but does it tell a story? No. It doesn't tell the story.



"I consider Pat [Broderick] a glitter artist."

*Immediately preceeding this interview, *CF*'s editors looked over some upcoming *ROM* and *MICRONAUTS* pages.

HOWELL: In our own defense, we'll have to point out that we were more interested in the *ROM* material because we follow that series regularly, and *MICRONAUTS* not so regularly.

KALISH: We're far more interested in that particular character than the others.

MANTLO: Oh, okay. But if you stack that Broderick work up next to Sal Buscema lay-out pages...

KALISH: I would say that Sal was by far the better choice in terms of the comics artist. His story is more straightforward. It's far more approachable in terms of...

MANTLO: All right, but see, what Sal lacks is the magic (although I'm beginning to question that, the more I see *ROM* coming out of him), and Pat had all the magic, but he didn't want to draw all the mundane street scenes and establishing shots. My plots would have, "Okay, Pat, now we break for a quiet moment with the Micronauts getting used to each other," nope. Forget that. What I got back was them flying, jumping, screaming—y'know, weird camera angles. So I say from issue twelve to twenty-nine, I was totally lost, in what was going on in *THE MICRONAUTS*. I had no idea. I wasn't getting back what I asked for in the plots. The whole "*S.H.I.E.L.D.*" thing was supposed to see armies in motion. Pat didn't want to draw armies. He wanted to draw one or two people, and then the background would be all smoky and weird (laughter). Y'know, who can blame him? It's a lot easier for me to write, "Okay, put in an army," than for him to draw it. Old Frank Robbins joke: He said once that some writer had asked him to have the cavalry charging, so he had two guys on a hill, one guy goes "Here comes the cavalry!" and the other says, "There goes the cavalry!" and having trained as an artist, I understand that. Jack Kirby was crazy. Jack Kirby was out of his mind. His stuff was beautiful, but nobody else could do that...

HOWELL: It just took him a half an hour.

MANTLO: Took him a half an hour—it would take Pat a day. Pat would draw everything thumb-nail size first, and then—I forget what they call it—Lucitype it, put it on a Lucy, which magnifies the image, and then trace his thumb-nails, line for line, so it took him all day to do it. So I was constantly struggling...loving the magic that Pat put into it, but knowing that it wasn't telling my story, and that I was being dumped on for the story being confusing. It was like a Catch-22; I loved the art, didn't want to lose Pat, but at the same time, my stories were meeting with disfavor from Jim, who said they were confusing. So Jim decided at that point that there was something seriously wrong with the book, and the pressure started coming down to the point where last week, or last month, I went crazy, caught between a rock and a hard place. I'd gotten issue #34 in from Pat. The first ten pages were comics story-telling at their best. Then, it was like...I couldn't understand what had happened. It was like someone had gone to Florida, hit Pat with a sledgehammer, and he suddenly understood how to tell a story. First ten pages were brilliant. Then we got the second ten pages, and they were terrible, both from a story-telling standpoint, and from an art standpoint. They looked rushed, they were crazy giant two-panel pages with talking heads, and I called Pat up and said, "What are you doing? Where is my story?" Tom DeFalco, who had been made the editor after Louise, called Pat up and said, "Where's the story?" What had happened was that Pat, being alone down in Florida, being a typical free-lancer, panicked, went crazy, decided the pressure was too much, and in effect had a mini-nervous breakdown—the same kind I was having up

here—and went nuts on the last half of the book. He was told to redraw it, and he decided not to, he'd washed his hands of the book and went away to have his brain flushed for a week, which is what I should have done. So I wrote a full script; Luke McDonnell pencilled it. Pat was off the book. We got issue #35 in, which is a terribly dull pedestrian job from Val Mayerik. And this was supposed to be the culmination of a six part story, a double issue: "*The Origin of the Microverse*," which would have been a total waste of time and space had Danny Bulanadi not saved it. Danny [Bulanadi] is a phenomenal inker. But that really crystallized to me everything that Jim said about the book. He was right. We got too confusing. We got to the point where you had to buy all six issues to understand it. I was doing a McGregor, which I swore I'd never do. We were totally at sea, and the best way to handle it seemed to be to walk in and ask Jim to cancel the book, after that issue: "We've wrapped it up, let's end it here, with a clean break, and I'll come back and do something less convoluted later." And it was like killing my own kid, because I cared a lot about the book. It was the first book I'd been allowed to create, and it had made me a fan favorite. (Up at Marvel, that seems to be the sign of greatness. Suddenly you get a halo, when you get an Eagle Award, or you get interviewed in *THE COMICS JOURNAL*, or you get flown to San Diego for a convention—you're a "*Fan Favorite*" which means you get to hang out with a lot of pimply little kids with loads of money to spend on original art.)

Again, I differentiate between readers and fans. Fans I find thoroughly obnoxious. Readers I find delightful. Readers are people who have a casual interest in comics, who are willing to buy for a four or five year period, regularly, and then grow up, and go on to other forms of literature, other forms of art. There may be a cross-over though. For instance, I will still pick up an issue of *JUSTICE LEAGUE* when I see starfish over the heroes' faces, because it's nostalgia—but at the same time, I understand that there's more to art or to comics or to literature than that. Fans don't. Fans are stillborn in that stage of their development. They stop right there. They never go beyond, or outside the field, and as a result, they get incredibly cynical, because the field can never meet the expectations of a fifteen- (or fifty-, I can't tell) year-old person, *regularly*, every month. It's not supposed to. It's supposed to meet the expectations of a seven-to-fifteen-year-old every month. And if someone else gets something out of it, great. If he doesn't, then he shouldn't be there every month, and he should be reading Dickens, or Le Carre, or whoever can better satisfy his fantasies.

HOWELL: Do you feel then, that there's a real division between subject mater that comics can handle, or just that it's a marketing distinction?

MANTLO: I think comics can handle any subject matter the Code allows.

HOWELL: Okay, I'm talking about the comics medium, not the industry here.

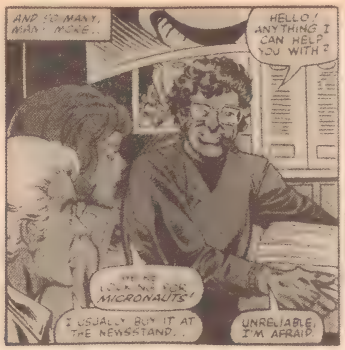
MANTLO: I think we can handle anything, and we can appeal to any group, be it reader, fan, adult, kid—once in a while. I don't think we can do it every month. I don't think it's possible. I mean, Dickens wrote monthly installments of his novels. That's how they appeared. You'd pick up a copy of a periodical, and there would be Chapter Three of *MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT*, or *BLEAK HOUSE*. And every month, you would come back, and read Chapter Four, and Chapter Five, and Chapter Six...but it was finite. You reached Chapter Twenty-Five, and it ended. You had your resolution, and you had a good read along the way—I think it must have been monthly. Comics don't do that. Every issue has to be a separate, self-enclosed chapter. Little resolutions may take place, continuity may build up, but every month, a new audience is going to come in and read this thing, and has to know who everybody is, and why they're here, and *You Can't Kill The Hero*. You can't kill the main characters, really. I mean, occasionally you can get away with it. You can't kill the premise of the book, or else you're cutting into your marketability. It's a two-pronged thing, and what you've got is fans saying, "We want novels. We want resolutions. We want the FF to die. We want Spider-Man to get so depressed that he commits suicide." And then we'll call this book *THE AMAZING...NOBODY...*

KALISH: THE AMAZING SUICIDE?

MANTLO: No, *THE AMAZING NOBODY*, because after a while, no one will remember. You'll have nice street scenes on the cover. That's a nice fantasy, I'd like to do that in *WHAT IF: "What If Spider-Man Committed Suicide?"* The book would go on, we'd just forget that he existed, and we'd have nice pictures—drawn by Gil Kane, y'know, people with upturned noses—but that's not the medium. And to expect that of the medium is to be perverse, is to be really asking something of a business, of a profession, that was never intended for that profession, but that is satisfied admirably in other fields. But the problem with fans is that they're so constipated, so locked in to "Comics as Art," or whatever *THE COMICS JOURNAL* tells them they should think that month, that they never get on to the other goddamn fields. They're never able to make the leap into literature. I mean, I'm talking literature. I'm not talking about that pap that people call science fiction, which solves little problems, and everything makes sense in a fabricated universe. I'm talking about literature that takes place in a real universe, and addresses problems that are universal. I have basic problems with science fiction, in that they create artificial environments, and then solve artificial problems specially crafted for artificial environments. Comic books do that, too. We are creating artificial environments, and every month, we have to solve these artificial problems, which generally—90% of the time—involve beating somebody to a pulp. All of us, I think, are consciously trying to get away from the physical part of it, and giving villains motivations that are most interesting. What Jim is saying is create stories that are interesting. It's not enough for a villain suddenly out of left field to say that he's doing this because society wronged him twenty years ago. The villain can be just as evil as he was before. The hero can be just as good, or just as screwed up as he was before, but they should work in a framework that's interesting and entertaining. Or you can delve into an aspect of the villain that has not been dealt with, or an aspect of the hero that has not been dealt with, as I'm trying to do in *THE HULK* and *ROM*. I've done a lot of fill-ins lately, which I'm finding now, as a secure writer, are fun. I recently did a *THOR*, which placed Thor in a position he's rarely been placed in; having to defend someone at the bottom of the barrel on this earth, instead of dealing with gnomes and trolls. And that was a fun story. I've done some fill-in *CAPTAIN AMERICA*s, some fill-in *SPIDER-MAN*s which got me *PETER PARKER*, because they've found that "Hey, what I've been telling you all along, I can write *SPIDER-MAN*," is true. What I'm telling you, the answer to your question, is that—and I think I'm trying to get to it—is that fans are expecting too goddamn much that is not possible.

"A comic is a self-enclosed package for kids 7-15 that tells a good, exciting story..."

If you want to read a good comic book, then let's understand what a good comic book is: A comic book is a hero (or heroes), villain or villains, be it alive or situational villains, a plot, action, conflict, resolution, all wrapped up in one or two issues. And then people go on to the next stage. Marvel's unique in that they we do go on to the next stage, carrying our luggage with us whereas DC never did, until they started copying Marvel. In *GREEN LANTERN* or *SUPERMAN* or *THE FLASH* every month it was "Hi there! I'm Barry Allen, and I have NO problems. I'm going to deal with this villain." And he never learned from experience. The guy was so dumb. The character never said, "Well, the last time I fought you, you did this." Superman was so fucking stupid. Besides the fact that half of Krypton had been imported to Earth in different colors, the guy never learned! If I saw Lex Luthor, I'd fry the guy with my heat vision, and not deal with the problem. Who needs this? Marvel worked that way. If Spider-Man saw a villain, his inclination was to beat the shit out of him first before the guy got to him. Because he had the memory of the previous encounter. So Marvel should be these little self-enclosed stories. Stories, not self-enclosed occurences, or happenings, if you remember Sixties art happenings. Never resolved anything. I went to one, believe this, this is true, in Soho, where an artist named Tosen Barak was indulging his morbid sense of humor by throwing raw meat off the roofs of buildings. Tons of raw meat were raining down out of the sky. Didn't mean anything; you were left to decide what the ultimate art value of this was. A lot of comics stories, you were in the same position, I think, from 1969 to 1975, 1976. You had to decide what the hell was going on, because the artist and the writer weren't going out of their way to tell you. I don't think that's a comic. A comic is a self-enclosed package for kids 7-15 that tells a good, exciting story, that makes them care about the characters, that makes the characters human, and lets you know that next month they'll be back, and just as human, just as exciting, just as problem-plagued and problem-solving as they were the issue before, that you'll maybe see some new sub-characters that you haven't seen before, that the hero will get involved with, and that their stories will be brought out. That's what a comic book is. It's not a novel, it's not...whatever they call it...graphic novels. It is not that, and it should not be that. It's an entertainment medium that comes out every month, and if you forget the every month part of it, you're not writing comics, you're writing something else. And to put the restrictions of other media on comics, or to put the expectations of other media on comics, is counter-productive. They don't work that way. If you want to bind "*War of the Worlds*," and read all twenty copies ten years


AND SO MANY, MANY MORE...
HELLO! ANYTHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH?
I'M HERE FOR MICRONAUTS!
I USUALLY BUY IT AT THE NEWSSTAND.
UNRELIABLE, I'M AFRAID.
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from now, and say, "Hey, this works as a whole," that's your business. But don't expect a seven or ten or fifteen year old to come along in the middle of it, and understand or care who these characters are are, because we've made no effort to get them to understand or care. Did I answer that? It's not a marketing decision, I mean, nobody at Marvel has come down and said, "Do one issue stories, because it's easier to sell in Europe," or "it's easier to stick in those little comics bags in Woolworth's."

HOWELL: No, the distinction I was making is that obviously there *is* a case to be made, inasmuch as you just made one, that the comics industry as we know it now, with all of its history and its present sales, is going to be counterproductive to its own health, if it doesn't realize that the one-issue stories and the clear story-telling and the emblematic heroes and villains, have to be there all the time.

MANTLO: Yeah, it's already...honestly, I do not know sales figures, I cannot quote you figures off the top of my head. I do know on *MICRONAUTS*, because I asked, that it's selling about 45,000 copies direct sales. That's respectable. It's selling 24%, abysmally, on the newsstands. We are losing the kids with every issue. Whereas *ROM* is selling like a sonofabitch. *ROM* is clear every issue, I introduce the character, I introduce the villain, I introduce the conflict, I resolve it. If it continues for two issues—you'll notice, even in my continued stories, there's a beginning, middle, and end each issue and problems that continue. Every issue is important in itself and for the whole. In *MICRONAUTS*, I failed at that, I think. In *MICRONAUTS*, I think I left the reader with the impression that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. They didn't need all the parts, they should have the whole. I did what McGregor did, and I was wrong. And if I continue on the book, it will not be done that way. Indeed, I will not be allowed to do it that way. But consciously, my own decision is not to do it that way. And again, that's where Shooter comes in as a top-notch editor. I may kick and scream as he drags me towards Point X, but when I get there I invariably find that he's right. Point X was a better place to be, and I just wish Jim was more diplomatic in telling you. But maybe that's counterproductive—maybe that's a contradiction, maybe you have to be dragged kicking and screaming to X, in order to understand what he's trying to tell you. Life is a great teacher. I've learned empirically all my life, not by reading or listening to someone else, but by doing.●

MARVEL's MICRONAUTS

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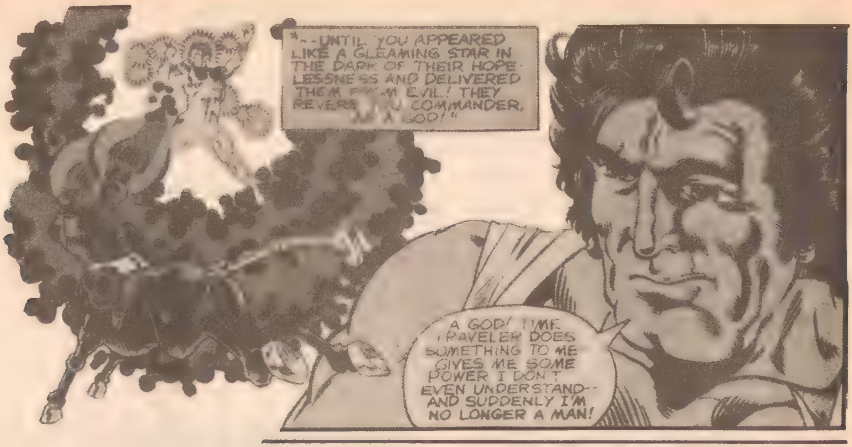
Of Marvel's three direct-sales-only titles, *THE MICRONAUTS* (the Bill Mantlo-written adventures of miniature heroes from the Microverse) stands out, not quite fitting the "fan book" image—the oddball of the oddball titles. With *KA-ZAR* and *MOON KNIGHT*—one an alternative barbarian, the other an alternative super-hero—it's quite easy to see why the series would appeal to fans familiar with comics, but would not quite catch the interest of the newsstand buyer, but *THE MICRONAUTS* seems to be an extremely commercial concept, aimed more toward the younger reader than the "sophisticated" fan. Its sister "toy book", *ROM* (also written by Bill Mantlo), does very well on the newsstands. So what makes *THE MICRONAUTS* a fan-only book? Perhaps a close examination of what makes the series what it is will help answer that question.

The most obvious thing about the *MICRONAUTS* in the first place is that it is based on a toy, and while the Mego Micronauts are no longer being marketed, the image still stays with the series. For the early issues, too, there is a clear commercial benefit. The Mego corporation advertised its toys—and by extension, the comic book—on national TV, and every time a kid passed a Micronauts display in a toy store, he would, conceivably, connect it with the comic. For that matter, any kid who owned at least one of the toys had a permanent advertisement in his home. But licensing projects are not usually the sort of thing the fans eagerly latch on to, unless the project is on the level of *STAR WARS* or something like that. *GODZILLA, THE SHOGUN WARRIORS, ROM, THE MAN FROM ATLANTIS, THE HUMAN FLY, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*... the fan response to all of them was at least wary, if not hostile, and I haven't heard any loud cheers about the forthcoming *G.I. JOE* book either. Oh, some licensing projects have caught on—*ROM* sells well, and *GODZILLA* was a fan favorite in some circles, but it wasn't the licensing angle that did it.

Aside from that, another factor which would tend to point towards *THE MICRONAUTS* being more popular with the casual buyer than the fan is that the book is modeled on a basis that proved successful for many Marvel Comics series—non-stop action, and a plethora of powerful images that make the stories seem louder, more colorful than others. (Rather than merely traverse dimensions, the Micronauts


"--UNTIL YOU APPEARED LIKE A GLEAMING STAR IN THE DARK OF THEIR HOPELESSNESS AND DELIVERED THEM FROM EVIL! THEY REVERE YOU COMMANDER, AS A GOD!"
A GOD! TIME TRAVELER DOES SOMETHING TO ME GIVES ME SOME POWER I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND-- AND SUDDENLY I'M NO LONGER A MAN!
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THE BIGGEST LITTLE EPIC OF ALL

by Kurt Busiek

must "break through the Spacewall" to reach Earth, and once there, it is not enough that they are menaced by a mad scientist—they rather have to fight the forces of H.E.L.L., thanks to the acronymous Human Engineering Life Laboratories. In fact, if some of the names floating around in the series were to be listed—The Enigma Force, Spacewall, Duchess Belladonna, Spartak, Major D'Ark, the Pleasure Pits, H.E.L.L., The Body Banks, The Prometheus Pit, Worldmind, Kaliklak, Odd John, Captain Universe—one might get the impression that the comic book in question was the work of Jack Kirby, the man who shapes most of Marvel's successful series. More than just names, the bizarre concepts rampant through the early days of the series, like the lower classes on Homeworld gambling for immortality at colossal Life Machines, or the whole idea of immortality by genetic replacement, make the book seem very Kirby-esque, which surely can't be coincidental.

There are concepts in *THE MICRONAUTS*, too, that strike me as Kirby-esque only in that they are so inventive. I don't mean to slight Bill Mantlo by insinuating that Kirby did it all first and Mantlo is only rehashing. It's just that when a comic book presents an idea that ranks up with those that regularly paraded through *THE FANTASTIC FOUR, THE NEW GODS, KAMANDI*, or *THOR*, it's hard not to associate it with Kirby. *THE MICRONAUTS* has been blessed with more than a few such ideas, most notably the Time Travellers, Spartak's Worldmind, and Captain Universe.

The Time Travellers, emissaries of the Enigma Force, were the big climactic revelation for the *MICRONAUTS*' first twelve-part story. And they were certainly worth the build-up. More than just a force that can fry the hell out of anything else in the Microverse (of which we have seen more than enough in space fantasy stories), the Enigma Force was made interesting because it was expressed through the mind of Commander Rann, leader of the Micronauts. The mysterious Time Travellers, who popped in and out of the first series, turned out to be psychic manifestations of Commander Rann's temporal selves, built up in numbers through his 1,000-year voyage in suspended animation. The fierce idealism of the hero, which we, of course, expected to come through in the end, had managed to latch into a primal force that affected reality, and that made quite an effective capper to an epic fantasy. However, since *THE MICRONAUTS* continued past the initial story, something had to be done to keep Rann's link with the Enigma Force from stepping in to save the heroes' bacon every time things got tough—a *deux ex machina* along the lines of, say, Spider-Man whipping the cosmic cube out of his back pocket whenever he can't just knock the villains unconscious. But one would hardly have expected Mantlo to destroy the Time Travellers, as he did in the Micronauts' second confrontation with Baron Karza. Again, it was unexpected and dramatic, and it certainly fit in with the book's penchant for doing things in a big way. And even without the Time Travellers, the Enigma Force (which was still around) made a pretty good "vast power controlling the destiny of reality." When Mantlo revealed the origin of the Microverse, however, the Enigma Force lost some of its grandeur. The readers were told that the lead character from an almost forgotten series Mantlo created in *MARVEL PREVIEW* had created the Enigma Force (and for that matter, the Microverse), from the power in his mystic sword, in order to save his followers from some fairly stock demons, becoming in the process the first Time Traveller. It's not so much that the material in this origin is uninteresting, so much as that it was presented in an uninteresting manner. To make an analogy with a part of the series mentioned earlier, the Micronauts' passages to Earth are no more than dimensional travel, something present in comics and science fiction seemingly since day one, but the fact that *THE MICRONAUTS* (as did *THE FANTASTIC FOUR* before it) treats

ELFQUEST III PORTFOLIO
by Wendy Pini

The Eflquest portfolios by Wendy Pini have proved themselves among the most popular ever published. Both *Elfquest I* and *Elfquest II* are long out of print and are commanding top collector's prices. Schanes & Schanes is pleased to announce the third release in this fabulous series: *Elfquest III*.

Elfquest III will be released in two editions. The regular edition will feature twelve delightful color plates, each 9¼" x 12¼", a full-figure portrait of one of the principal members of the Wolfriders tribe—the hardy characters that populate the Elfquest saga. These portraits originally appeared as the back covers to *Elfquest Comics* #1 through #12. They are now reproduced on heavy coated art stock, ready for display. In addition, Ms. Pini has created a stunning new full-color piece of art for the cover of the presentation folder that holds the plates. The interior plates are reproduced in color on the back cover. We have commissioned a special Mylar "snug" for this edition, to protect the portfolio and enhance the cover. This high-quality production, *Elfquest III* regular edition (unsigned), sells for only $12.00.

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passage between the worlds as something very special makes it seem more impressive. If we really cared about Prince Wayfinder and his dilemmas (which we can't, really, not after seeing only the bare beginning of his quest in *MARVEL PREVIEW*) or had a feeling for the power of the Sword in the Star, it could have worked. It also would have helped if the demons had more personality and menace. As it is, linking the awesome and powerful Enigma Force with unexciting beginnings makes it lose something.

Captain Universe, however, remains just as strong a concept as ever, even though he/she/it is—supposedly—just as much an emissary of the Enigma Force as the Time Travellers. Possibly this is because the idea of a super-heroic identity that attaches itself to someone—anyone, maybe—at times of crisis is so fascinating that it really doesn't matter where its power comes from. Indeed, when Captain Universe has shown up in *THE MICRONAUTS* (#8 and #35), the power source has been cited as the Enigma Force, but in other appearances, the power has come from the non-Microverse-oriented Uni-power. What it amounts to is that in a Captain Universe story, someone is given great personal power, and wields it to whatever end their character dictates. With a permanent super-hero, like Captain America, we see them in crisis situations so often that the basis of the character—the heroism—becomes taken for granted and to some degree uninteresting, since there are so many heroes and they are all heroic month in and month out. But with Captain Universe, we get to see an ordinary person as a super-hero—someone who will be ordinary *again* after the crisis is over. It could be a patriotic ex-astronaut, getting the chance to prove his devotion to family and nation (*MICRONAUTS #8*), or a cat-burglar intent on a revenge that may be justice in fact, but not intention (*MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #11*), or even Bruce Banner in opposition to his destructive alter ego, the Hulk (*HULK ANNUAL #15*). In fact, pretty much the only time Captain Universe would be conceptually uninteresting would be with a personality of already proven heroism, as we saw when Commander Rann and Dr. Strange merged into CU to repair the Spacewall (*MICROS #35* again). There, Captain Universe was only a set of powers, and didn't reveal anything we didn't know already about either hero's personality.

For sheer power of concept, however, the best thing to come out of the entire *MICRONAUTS* series so far has to be Spartak, planet of the Acroyear race. Like many other warrior races (Gordon Dickson's Dorsai leap readily to mind), the Acroyears were shaped by their harsh, forbidding world, but in this case, it's not merely the natural conditions on the planet, but the personality of the world itself. The Acroyears were once a peaceful race, who were forced to leave the planet they evolved (or whatever) on, and when they settled on Spartak, they made a pact with the planet: As long as they were true to it, it would shelter and protect them. In *MICRONAUTS #9 - 10*, King Acroyear calls on the Worldmind, and the planet does physically defend its people, crushing the invaders in landslides, catching spaceships in gouts of flame, and even hurling spaceship-sized boulders into space to destroy the invaders. The Acroyears' devotion to their planet and the harsh ways it imposes on them becomes more than culture, more than a religious belief, and it gives the grim warriors a racial unity that makes it next to impossible not to admire the reams of Acroyears that get wiped out in the battle scenes, no matter whose side they're fighting on. And in #28, when the planet sacrifices its life-force (again through King Acroyear) to save Earth and the Microverse, it only strengthens the image of the Acroyears as noble warriors—and it sure makes the planet Spartak seem like something well worth fighting for, even if it's only a memory. More than just to save its people's lives, however, the Worldmind sacrificed itself to free the Acroyears from their stony warrior existence, and to allow them to grow and regain some of the gentleness and feeling they had before they came to Spartak. There's something very familiar about that—the idea of a parent realizing its own limitations and forcing the children "out of the nest" to learn more than can be learned at home—but in this case, it isn't merely a parent, it's a planet, and nothing in the series comes close to the stark power of that image.

THEN MAYBE THEY STILL DON'T SUSPECT THAT ANYTHING'S WRONG! ACROYEAR-- TRY TO RETURN TO THE ASTROSTATION!
STEVE AND MUFFIN WON'T FIT IN AN AIR-SHAFT, COMMANDER!
I KNOW THAT, MARI! I'M HOPING STEVE'S A GOOD ENOUGH ACTOR--

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"Another facet of the typical Marvel comic present in the *MICRONAUTS*...is the idea of a balanced variety of personalities among the magazine's cast." Pictured here are the original team, plus Muffin (a friendly spaniel who figured prominently in the Golden issues).

Another facet of the typical Marvel comic present in the *MICRONAUTS* from the first issue is the idea of a balanced variety of personalities among the magazine's cast. The characters are strongly differentiated from each other, and where one is stodgy and tradition-minded, another is feisty and disrespectful of authority, and another is aloof and unemotional, and so on. The characters interact, their various personalities playing off each other and creating an interesting "family" rather than just a collection of individuals. As a matter of fact, the original cast of characters in *THE MICRONAUTS* has parallels to a team which has proven itself extremely commercial, both in comics and in movies. Matching up the *STAR WARS* cast with the *MICRONAUTS* yields Commander Rann as Luke Skywalker, Princess Mari/Princess Leia, Biotron/C-3PO, Microtron/R2-D2, Bug/Han Solo, Acroyear/Chewbacca, Time Traveller/

Obi-Wan "Ben" Kenobi, and for that matter, Baron Karza/Darth Vader. The characters are not so similar as to be copies, but they pair off and interact in much the same ways. Biotron is not prissy like C-3PO, but his stuffiness puts him in the same realm, and the core of the group is still the hero (Rann/Luke), and his girlfriend (Mari/Leia).

Mantlo has changed the team around considerably since #1, possibly to differentiate it from the *"Star Wars"* situation, and let the team establish its own identity once it had established itself commercially. Though Jasmine, Cilicia, Fireflyte, and Prince Pharoid have come and gone—perhaps indicating that the Micronauts can't hang on to female characters—the major changes have been the addition of Devil and Nanotron, and the loss of Biotron. Why Biotron was chosen for destruction over the others is a mystery to me, unless it was because he was difficult to draw. His personality was the most clearly defined of the team, without there being nothing left to do with it. The description of Biotron in #1—"One of the original 6000-series of 'thinking roboids,' he has become obsolete during his 1,000-year sojourn with Commander Rann...and he doesn't *like* the idea!"—sums up the character very well. As a robot who is outdated, but in order to complain about that would have to admit to it first, he has far more depth than the feisty, cutesy Microtron, and because of his link with Commander Rann and his feud with Microtron, he served to tie the characters together better, getting them to interact more. Of the new Micronauts, Devil adds to the team's cohesiveness, altering the relationship between Bug and Acroyear, and helping tie Acroyear more firmly to the rest of the team, something the character needed after the loss of Cilicia. And though Devil occasionally seems merely to uphold the tendency in Marvel teams to have a member with claws and fangs, his odd sense of humor, at odds with his monstrous body, gives him a bizarre atmosphere certainly fitting the mood of the series. Nanotron, however, offers little to the book beyond a cloying manner and the odd idea that all females, even robots (if there is such a thing as a female robot), have breasts. She is a one-dimensional character, serving only for cute lines and to make Microtron even cuter than he was before. This, too, would indicate that the book's market is on the newsstands rather than in the specialty shops. If there's one thing comics fans cannot abide, it's overt trendiness, and cute robots are about as trendy as it gets, these days.

In any case, the series being grounded in a solid, commercial format, Mantlo proceeded to do space opera adventure with a twist, that being that when this band of adventurers comes to Earth, they are only a few inches high! Much of the war for dominion of the Microverse is played out on Earth, and the juxtaposition of the spaceships'n'blasters fights with extremely normal settings, like a backyard or a skateboard rink, set the series apart from the more conventional space operas like *STAR WARS* and *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*. But just as the size difference makes it more than just a space battle series, the space battle makes it more than just another *"Ant Man"*-type series. Whereas Ant-Man, the Atom, or the crew of *LAND OF THE GIANTS* get their appeal from running around in a world much bigger than they are, where needles are swords and cats dangerous monsters, the juxtaposition of the running action concerns, which are on the Micronauts' scale, and the setting, which dwarfs them, gives *THE MICRONAUTS* a very different atmosphere than the other "tiny" comics series. And when the two worlds begin to interact—that's when the stories are the most enjoyable. The sequence in #2, for example, in which young Steve Coffin takes on the enemy fleet with a rake is priceless, as is the scene in which the Micronauts have to deal with the Florida State Police in a spaceship/car chase. The familiar surroundings make the bizarre events going on seem much more convincing, which makes the book more enjoyable. One issue's battle takes place backstage at a McDonald's (#22), and the havoc unleashed amidst the hamburgers and hot fat must have made some comics readers' trips to the fast-food stores more interesting. And the recent *"Death-Duel in a Grade School"* (#36) continues the series of epic battles on familiar ground, something few (if any) other comics series can offer.

WREEOWRRR
TOOLS
COFFIN
BILL CROOKS TIRES
N-NICE MAMMAL! YOU'LL LET ME BACK TO THE SHIP IN PEACE, WON'T YOU? N-NO-- I GUESS YOU WON'T!
© 1982 Marvel Comics Group

"Much of the war...is played out on Earth..."

The Micronauts' team-ups with human heroes have further reinforced the size differences. The most effective was the teaming with The Fantastic Four against Psycho-Man, in which the FF were shrunk down to Micronaut size, except for the Human Torch, who stayed relatively giant-sized. Since this story took place in the Microverse, where everything was to Micro-scale, it reversed the situation of the Micronauts on Earth. Instead of being tiny people in an oversized world, the Micronauts were normal, and it was The Torch who was a gargantuan ally against the hordes of Psycho-Man. The S.H.I.E.L.D. team-up didn't come off so well, however, possibly because for much of it there was simply a human-sized firefight going on with a smaller firefight in the middle of it. The difference in size was not

played up; it was simply *there*, and again, it was potentially interesting material presented in an uninteresting manner.

The only time the Micronauts' size does not matter to the stories is when they are in the Microverse, concerned only with Microversal things. The series loses a lot of its charm and, I think, commercial appeal when the relationship with Earth is nonexistent, because without the size difference, *THE MICRONAUTS* is just another space opera series. There isn't anything particularly wrong with being only a space opera series, but when there's something built into the fabric of the book that sets it apart from other comics, it should be utilized. Why not play to your strengths? For example, in the six-part *"Origin of the Microverse,"* if a part of the story featuring the Micronauts had taken place on Earth, the series' uniqueness could have been kept in the lime-light. And it wouldn't have been that difficult. After all, if the Microverse was created as a refuge for a civilization that once lived on Earth, it would have been reasonable to have had some of the blues to that origin on Earth, beyond merely the hieroglyphic prophecy, which the stars of the book found elsewhere anyway.

A comic book is not created by the writer alone, and so something of what put *THE MICRONAUTS* where it is now must be tied in the art. The two artists who have had the most influence on the series have been Michael Golden and Pat Broderick, and when analyzing what these two brought to the series, it becomes clear why the title appeals to the fan buyers than to the mainline crowd. Golden, who created the visuals for the cast of characters, drew issues #1-12, and set the artistic tone for the series, is a very flashy, impressive artist, and draws stuff that the fans love, because it's so very pretty. He made the Microverse into a fantasy world full of bizarre architecture and even more bizarre technology—the sort of place that thorium orbiters, hydro-copters, and all the other kooky-looking paraphenalia Mego had created belong in. His battles were spectacular, and his character work was deft and expressive. As the series progressed, he became an excellent storyteller, too, illustrating Mantlo's plots with wit and drama. That he was the sort of artist fans love was only a part of it, because he was an excellent comics artist all around. However, he drew only twelve issues, and after Howard Chaykin's brief tenure as illustrator, Pat Broderick was chosen as an adequate replacement for Golden.

Broderick's art style certainly had the requisite surface characteristics. He draws very flashy, glitzy stuff that the fans buy because it is pretty, but unfortunately, the rest of Golden's attributes as a penciller are for the most part lacking in Broderick. In order to concentrate on the flashy stuff, Broderick tended to ignore the story-telling. Where the size differential between the characters must be continually maintained and reinforced, less than excellent story-telling can make even a fairly straightforward plot confusing. And a lot of the plots Broderick was illustrating for *THE MICRONAUTS* were anything but straightforward. Both the second *"Baron Karza"* story and the *"Origin of the Microverse"* sequence had a lot of different characters that had to be made coherent to the reader each issue, and a number of plot thread intertwining, to build to a (hopefully) satisfying climax. Now, while comics fans will ignore a lack of competent story-telling to buy flashy pictures, the newsstand audience seldom will. And when you add to that a complex story that needs to be followed from issue to issue, difficult to understand for the casual reader who picks up the second or third issue of the series, it's almost a sure thing that the only chance that book has of selling is in the specialty shops. So with that in mind, it's easy to see why *THE MICRONAUTS* has been made into a direct-sales-only title.

WE WAIT FOR THE DAY WHEN KARZA, IN HIS MONUMENTAL ARROGANCE, SHALL LEAVE HOMEWORLD UNGUARDED!
IN ANTICIPATION OF THAT WE HAVE LABORED TO CREATE A NETWORK OF REBELLION IN THE SHADOW TEMPLES!
FOR IT WAS FORETOLD LONG AGO THAT A CHAMPION WOULD ONE DAY RISE ON HOMEWORLD
—TO DELIVER US IN OUR DARKEST HOUR! GAZE UPON THE IMAGE OF THAT CHAMPION!

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"The only time the Micronauts' size does not matter to the stories is when they are in the Microverse, concerned only with Microversal things. The series loses a lot of its charm and...commercial appeal when the relationship with Earth is nonexistent, because without the size difference, *THE MICRONAUTS* is just another space opera series."

However, the situation that lost the series its newsstand readers is gone. Mantlo has reversed his continued-epic tendencies, and is writing clear, strong stories that play to the book's strength, and making sure to explain the characters and situations each issue, so that newcomers will not be confused. At that sort of comics writing, Mantlo is one of the best in the business, as his *ROM* and *HULK* series show well. In addition to that, the art is currently being done by Gil Kane, who is certainly a strong story-teller capable of making even complex material easy to follow. For that matter, Kane's work on *THE ATOM* has shown he can handle the size difference shtick quite effectively. So as *THE MICRONAUTS* stands now, it looks as if it should feature an extremely commercial concept, written and drawn for prime enjoyment by exactly the audience to which it is unavailable—the newsstand audience. This leads to an interesting question. If a book is made a direct-sales-only title because it doesn't appeal to the newsstand buyers under certain conditions, is it possible for that book to be repaired, and if so, is there any way to tell, so it doesn't remain cut off from most of its audience forever? For the sake of *THE MICRONAUTS*, I hope so. ●

A special INTERVIEW UPDATE on Bill Mantlo's work

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Author of

THE HULK
ROM
MICRONAUTS
and
PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN

HOWELL: Your workload has shifted somewhat since we last spoke.
MANTLO: Yeah, I just got *PETER PARKER* back again—and after having sworn I'd never write Spider-Man again...

HOWELL: You mentioned that there was not always the greatest amount of communication between the writers of those books.
MANTLO: There was very little communication. When Len [Wein] left for DC and Marv [Wolfman] took over, we decided to work out some kind of continuity between the two books. At that time I was writing *SPECTACULAR*; Marv was writing *AMAZING*. The problems came in in that Marv took a proprietary interest in *all* the major villains—didn't want me to use any of them, which meant I was left scrambling for sloppy seconds. And even though Marv and I tried to work out continuity, I was very fast and Marv was very slow, so I would be plotting four, five, six issues ahead, and Marv would still be back in the next issue after the one on the stands.
HOWELL: Making effortless continuity pretty impossible?
MANTLO Yeah. So we got nowhere. I tried to tell him where I was going; he tried to tell me where he was going. We never met up.

I don't know if I quit or was taken off the book. Whichever it was, I was kind of grateful, because it was a no-win situation.
HOWELL: And things have changed?
MANTLO: Things have changed radically. There were three reasons I took it on: I like Spider-Man, I've always liked the character since the day I picked it up at the newsstand. I think I write the dialogue very well, and, in the time I've been away from it, I've learned to plot. I'm bringing that back. I'm better than I was, it's better than it was, and I think I can give a lot to the character, so that part of it intrigued me.

The second part was that I was told Ed Hannigan was going to be the artist, and Ed Hannigan has been a personal favorite of mine for many years. I think he's one of the most creative, innovative, exciting young artists on the scene today and has yet to be discovered—primarily through his own fault in that he's very erratic with the amount of work he does and the continuity of the work he does. He doesn't stay at anything long enough to become a fan favorite. Ed assured me at the time that he's going to stay on the book and make it a fan favorite. That may have changed (laughter), but I'm very grateful for the work he has done, since he's turned out some phenomenal jobs already, which you'll start to see in *PETER PARKER #64*, my first *"Cloak and Dagger"* story.
HOWELL: Ah, yes—I saw the cover for that.
MANTLO: Right. That's Ed with a good inker, Al Milgrom, and it just shows you the magic that could be in this book.

And then, thirdly, Tom DeFalco, Roger Stern and I sat down and said, "This is ridiculous, this poor man's Spider-Man book. Let's either cancel it, or do it right—which is get the continuity going between the two books." Roger and I have begun talking to each other practically weekly as to where we're taking the character, what stages of his life Peter should be in, who will mention what in what book—*SPECTACULAR* will not be the "school" book and *AMAZING* the "newspaper" book any more. We're

going to bounce back and forth between the two. If Spider-Man meets a girl in *AMAZING*, she'll show up in *SPECTACULAR*...

HOWELL: And *TEAM-UP*?

MANTLO: And *TEAM-UP*. Right—Jim De Matteis was in on this. We all realize that *TEAM-UP* is kind of out there in limbo; whatever major continuity developments appear in the two main books will appear in *TEAM-UP*. No developments will take place in any of the three books unless they're all checked between us.

HOWELL: I see.

MANTLO: And correlated with Tom. So, in other words, when in *SPECTACULAR #65* or *#66*, when Spider-Man puts the webbing back under his arms, it's there in all the books; it's mentioned in all the books. It's a major development. When Debra Whitman goes off the deep end, that's mentioned in all the books. It's a major development. When Aunt May leaves the nursing home and decides to open a halfway house for senior citizens, it's mentioned in my book, it's established in my book that she's going to do it, and then she does it in *AMAZING*. The Black Cat shows up in Roger's book, in *AMAZING*, and we get some kind of crazy adventure with her, and then she's going to show up in *SPECTACULAR* as kind of a love interest for Spider-Man, for a change, instead of Peter Parker. We've got a wacko super-villainess who loves Spider-Man. Cloak and Dagger will—I hope—appear in *AMAZING*, although I'm kind of holding onto those two characters. I created them in 1964, and they reappeared in 1969 and 1970. I want them to appear everywhere; I just want them to appear right. It's not a case of a proprietary interest—"These are mine and you can't use them."

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HOWELL: Quality control, then?

MANTLO: Yeah. "These are mine; please use them the way they deserve to be used." So I'm hoping they show up in *AMAZING*. And I'm pushing for them to show up in the New X-Men book.

HOWELL: Oh. Are they mutants?

MANTLO: Well, we're leading up to that. They may or may not be. But they're sufficiently close for the New X-Men to have an interest in them. But they're so into their own thing that it may be difficult for them to join anything. I can say this categorically: I think they're the best two characters so far this decade.

HOWELL: Hmm. Okay...

MANTLO: I hope next issue really gets received the way it should be received, because it's really going to make a big difference.

So we're correlating all this with Tom, and what we determined—which should have been determined many years ago—was that Spider-Man *is* the Marvel Comics character. He is *Mister* Marvel Comics, and he's gotten short shrift since Marv left. He's really been treated off-handedly. Crummy inkers—practically no one pays the least bit of attention. He's a corporate character in a lot of fans' minds, which I object to. We are consciously going to strive to make him the benchmark character for Marvel Comics again—and Tom gets full credit for this. He said, "This is Marvel's character, and we're going to do it better than any book in the house." So, I think, once we get the artist business straightened out—Ed is doing a couple issues, and some fill-ins are being done—once we know that we've got an artist (and I hope it's Ed, if there's only some way we can shackle him onto a table) I think the fans are going to sit up and start noticing that there's something happening in this book. The magic is back after too many years.

HOWELL: What is it that draws you to Spider-Man and the Hulk, since you've said you don't in general care to write the super-hero books?

MANTLO: Yeah; that's true. I guess Spider-Man has been the longest-term Marvel character I've been familiar with, I picked up an issue —#4, I believe, with Sandman—and it was the first Marvel comic I bought. There had been a couple of the monster comics...

HOWELL: They don't count.

MANTLO: They don't count. But

everything about that character attracted me—the fact that he was insecure, the fact that—y'know, it was me at that stage of my life, 13 and skinny and book-oriented rather than wrestling-team oriented.

And as I grew, he seemed to grow. He was a little bit behind; I went to high school and college and he finally got out of high school, he went to college and then he got out of college and went to grad school...

HOWELL: He's slow.

MANTLO: Well, Marvel time, it was about the same. He had a continuing cast of friends, which none of the DC mags had, and Marvel mags started to have, but it never was really the same continuity, the same consistency. I can't think of any other sub-characters in any other book, with the exception of maybe Foggy Nelson, that have continued as long as Jameson and Flash Thompson and Harry Osborn and Liz Allen.

And that's really astonishing. No other book—no other Marvel book, even—has kept their characters that long, in such a way that the readers really care.

HOWELL: Yeah, it's a real selling point on that. It's like *GASOLINE ALLEY*.

MANTLO: Okay. Right.

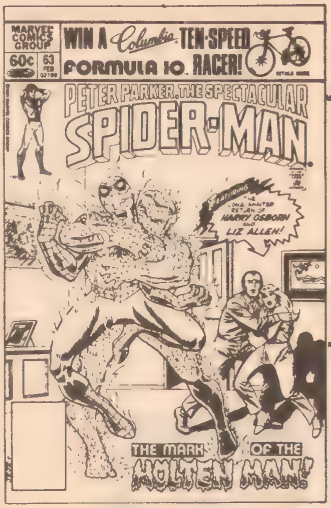
And I'm going to start doing things. I'm going to be doing a Jameson issue. I'm going to deal with these fellow teaching people they've got, and probably drop them and assemble a new cast of characters, and maybe bring back Flash and the old ones for occasional appearances. Although I make clear in issue #63 that they all lead their own lives. That part of his life has changed too. Jameson is really the only character who's still there through it all, although not without some wear. There were time when he was really treated as a clown; all the idiot Spider-Slayers and all that—and we're going to get away from that. Doctor Octopus, I think, is going to come in as a major villain for a change.

HOWELL: That'd be nice.

MANTLO: It's sort of the way Kingpin has developed in *DAREDEVIL*. And again, get away from the buffoonery of him being an alcoholic and marrying Aunt May, which I hope no one will remember.

HOWELL: Back to the "Master Planner" image?

MANTLO: Yeah, I think so, which Frank [Miller] started to develop in that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annual [*SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL* #15]. He's going to be there—he's going to be the pudgy Doctor Octopus, the guy who went after people because they mocked him, not because—I don't know where he developed those incredible biceps. But I want to go back to this image of a frumpy little guy in a lab coat...

HOWELL: And Devo glasses...

MANTLO: And Devo glasses... and tear apart the world, and have the power to do it, although he may not look like he can do it.

So, right after Cloak and Dagger, we're doing a story called *"Waiting for Doctor Octopus,"* where we see what a kid who admires super-villains is like. This kid tries to become Doctor Octopus; he has a Doctor Octopus fan club...

HOWELL: Sounds timely.

MANTLO: And that's going to be the beginning of the revival of Doctor Octopus. He only appears peripherally in the story, it's called *"Waiting for Doctor Octopus,"* and he never shows up—y'know, in a continuity sense.

But we're going to start hinting he's around, what it is he's doing, and Spider-Man can't rest knowing he's out there. So that's going to be the beginning of that, and I've got some long-range plans for him. The Kingpin appears, off and on—in the Boomerang issue, Boomerang tries to take Bullseye's place in Kingpin's organization, and Kingpin is just going to be sitting back delighted, with everybody against each other. It's just kind of homage to *DAREDEVIL*, since both Ed and I are ecstatic over what Frank is doing there.

HOWELL: So you're planning on basically cleaning up the whole *"Peter Parker"* act.

MANTLO: Oh yeah.

HOWELL: Making it an equally indispensible *"Spider-Man"* title?

MANTLO: Definitely. And I think changes have started in #62, but they really hit the fan in #64. There's going to be some rough spots; #65, for instance, is not drawn by Ed. #66 and #67 are; #68 isn't. I'm hoping that, with Al inking it, the musical artists won't be as blatant; the stories will continue to tie all together.

HOWELL: Okay. Now, about the Hulk...

MANTLO: What about the Hulk?

HOWELL: Granted that Bruce Banner is

also skinny and underdeveloped and like that, what draws you to that title?

MANTLO: Again, I have a great deal of difficulty with a character who goes into a phone booth and takes off his clothes and becomes super. Don Blake no longer has any problems; he could probably make a million a year as a lame physician. Without Jane Foster there, I lost interest in the book early. The Mighty Thor is too mighty, too handsome...

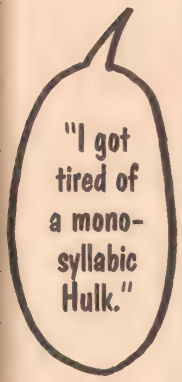
HOWELL: Too everything.

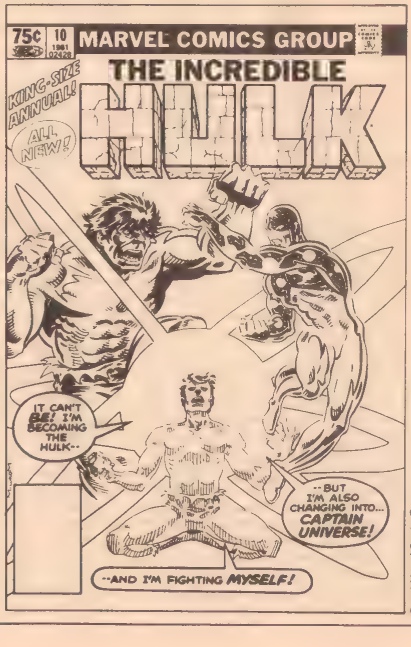
MANTLO: Too everything, for my taste.

But I guess the Iron Man *shtick* of putting on a costume to go out and fight has gotten boring to me. I think other people do it remarkably well, yet, to me, I don't find the conflict very important. I'm looking for characters with endemic conflict.

HOWELL: That can either be carried over from their concepts or returned without changing what they've become?

MANTLO: Yeah. To me, Stan always understood the seminal reason for these characters. He created the Hulk as a skinny, mild-mannered genius scientist, who turns into a monstrous, blustering savage—mindless monster. When he created the Leader, it was like a joke, a pun on the Hulk. You've got a skinny guy with no brains becoming a guy with all brains. Banner is the guy with no strength becoming the guy who's all strength. The Hulk is the guy with no mind deriving from the guy with all mind. I want to play with that, after our incredibly zany twentieth anniversary issue (where both minds end up in both bodies) and what you're going to end up with is a Banner/Hulk and a Hulk/Banner. Bruce Banner is going to be running around screaming, "Banner smash!" and unable to control his temper and his anger. But, at the same time, the Hulk is going to start reasoning. It's not going to be a *total* switch; each one is going to have parts of each brain. At moments they'll be lucid; at moments they'll be insanely raging around the room. The Hulk can control when he becomes Banner, and Banner can control when he becomes the Hulk, to a degree. I'm going to start playing on that very heavily, to the point where it's really intriguing. I got tired of a monosyllabic Hulk. I think Len took the "child-Hulk" as far as it could go. Roger tried to do the psycho-analytic Hulk, but the Hulk was still the Hulk. He just lay there and people did things around him. This Hulk is going to think—he's going to become more of a danger *because* he can think. There's one story, which I just finished plotting, where Banner's mind is in charge the entire time, and he realizes that it doesn't matter—once you're the Hulk, you're *always* the Hulk. He screws up even worse than the Hulk might have. So I want to play with that and see where that goes.





Meanwhile, I'm developing Rick Jones as someone who realizes that a cure for Dr. Banner means the end of his friendship with the Hulk, and a return to a life of relative obscurity. Rick Jones has never been anything except someone's side-kick. Without the Hulk, there goes the side to kick. So Rick, knowing that this means the end of the Hulk, in a moment when he thinks that the Hulk is a danger, tries to re-create himself as a new Hulk, only to turn green and ill. And we're going to bring in Bereet from *RAMPAGING HULK*, and Rick will eventually be cured physically, although he's going to have some problems as to who he is and what he wants out of life.

By the way, with Bereet's appearance, we state that all those *RAMPAGING HULK* issues were nothing but a movie. They never took place; they were Bereet's movie, made on her planet, and that kind of takes care of the continuity flaws that *RAMPAGING HULK* presented, which I always objected to. The idea of diluting the Hulk's original appearances in *THE AVENGERS* and his own magazine, by pretending they had all taken place a week earlier, and that everyone already knew. So we erased that—it was all fiction.

And, eventually what's going to happen is that Rick's going to drive the Hulk off and Bruce is going to drive

Betty off. The Hulk is going to be alone. And at that point I'm going to start developing an entire new cast of characters, doing stories that revolve more around the Hulk more like a "*Swamp Thing*" character, semi-reasoning, getting into adventures on his own where he doesn't need peripheral characters to explain to him what's happening. All this really begins with #271, which is the 20th anniversary—it introduces Rocket Raccoon and—

HOWELL: Re-introduces.

MANTLO: Well, he's being introduced. I'm forgetting that he ever appeared before. I've tried to develop a funny animal strip that *will* sell as a Marvel Comic. That kicks off in *HULK #271*. We've already got a mini-series planned. And if reaction to it is as good as I hope it will be, that should be a series.

HOWELL: On to *THE MICRONAUTS*.

MANTLO: MICRONAUTS is the most depressing book I've ever... *MICRONAUTS* has become incredibly depressing. It's too bad.

HOWELL: How so?

MANTLO: Well, it's a book I loved, the *first* book I created for Marvel; I loved it. Michael Golden and I did twelve phenomenal issues; Michael left because of deadline pressures, and it went through a series of musical artists, whose work ranged from mediocre to maudlin. I just began to lose interest. I could not keep any kind of continuity going in the art. I was being told to "keep the Micronauts on Earth," to "keep them little people in a big world," which was totally opposed to my concept of the book originally.

HOWELL: Didn't some of this get solved during the temporary discontinuing?

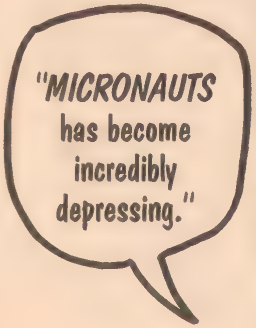
MANTLO: Well, that did. But the artist problem didn't get resolved.

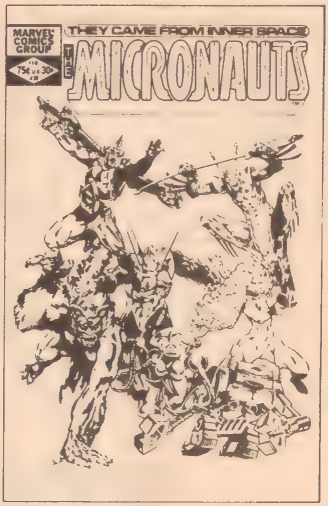
HOWELL: I thought Gil Kane was drawing it...

MANTLO: Well, we'll get to that.

We were so ready to cancel it, and Mike Friedrich came in and said, "Let's do it direct-sales, and try that approach," and I said, "Okay, but only if you promise me a decent artist."

Friedrich wanted to give it a shot. Now, he was pushing for Broderick or Golden. Broderick had signed a contract with DC, and I didn't want to work with the guy any more. He didn't want to do my stories; he wanted to do whatever he does. Golden was unavailable; we had a fill-in drawn by John Garcia, and that became the first issue. Ditko did a fast





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one, which looked rather pedestrian until Danny Bulanadi inked it. And then I was told we had gotten Gil Kane. Now, Gil has been a personal favorite of mine for many, many years—I have letters in the old *TALES TO ASTONISH* raving about Gil's work on *"The Hulk."* So when I was told that, the excitement started, and Al said, "Okay, you can do the book any way you want it, finish up the Earth stuff, get 'em back in the Microverse, and do what you do. If it fails, you know you've failed because of your concept, not because of something that's been imposed on you." So that all sounded fair.

Gil did issue #40; it was fine. Lots of big panels, lots of power. Danny inked it beautifully. #41 started coming in, and looked great. Now, we don't know what's going on. The book reaches page 29, and Gil's only halfway through the plot and it's over. And so I don't know what's happening there. That's where we're sitting right now. Al's making some decision on what we do—do we make it a two-part story? Do we go through the ceiling? Do we fire Gil? Do we tell Gil to shape up or ship out? And it's all very sad. This was the third revival I had myself all psyched up for, and now it looks like it's just going to be more of the same. I don't understand why this book, which the fans seem to love, cannot attract a decent artist, I don't know what it is about the series, but it doesn't seem to affect any other series.

So I don't know what's happening with the series. #42 and #43 are plotted. We were going to get them back to the Microverse, create a new ship, deal with just the Microverse and rebellion and all that. And then I was going to get to do the kinds of stories I wanted to do. But now I don't know what's happening.

HOWELL: So it's all pretty much up in the air right now?

MANTLO: Yeah, which is too bad. It's a very good book. It could be a great book, but it's never had the breaks a consistent artist could give it. And again, I don't understand why it is that an artist can't draw this book. It's a lot of characters, but then, so is the Avengers, and the Justice League, and the Fantastic Four and all that.

I think a lot of it has to do with artists being prima donnas. George Perez is the exception. George gets into a concept, does it with you, creates things that you never thought of, and the mesh is

incredible. Byrne will only do it if he does it himself. Cockrum and Claremont have their good thing going on *THE X-MEN* and don't want to do anything else. *MICRONAUTS*, with the exception of Golden, consistently seemed to get artists who couldn't care less, who either didn't want to think about the character or who were incapable of thinking at all, who couldn't follow plots—Gil and Pat being prime examples. I don't understand that. My plots are, for the most part, page-by-page—in some cases, panel-by-panel—and I fail to understand what attitudes or professionalism entails reading something like this and misinterpreting it (laughs). I couldn't make it plainer unless I drew it myself...which is an idea we toyed with and rejected. So that's really depressing.

HOWELL: Have you toyed with the idea of leaving the book?

MANTLO: Oh, yeah, I was ready to leave. That's why I asked for it to be cancelled. I said I was going to leave if Broderick didn't start following my plots. Broderick quit, and so that solved that problem. I was really happy to work with Giffen, and then *Keith* flipped out, for the third time since I've known him, and left us with half a book drawn. So I was ready to say, "Kill the book, cancel it, at least let it die a clean death, instead of dragging and screaming to its grave." And then they promised me Gil, and I got all excited again, and now I don't know what I'm going to do.

HOWELL: It sounds like one of those situations that might reverse itself in another week...

MANTLO: Who knows. I just don't understand why this book of all books causes this kind of grief.

HOWELL: Well, let's talk about stable books. Let's talk about *ROM*.

MANTLO: Gladly. Something about the character—I don't know what it is—intrigues me, about this guy stuck on Earth. It's the Silver Surfer, except isntead of being wrapped in silver foil, he's wrapped in Spaceknight armor. But it's *better* than the Surfer, which is probably blasphemy. (It is at the office.) The Surfer used to walk around constantly with his hand to his forehead, "*Oy gevalt*!"...

HOWELL: "Whimper whimper..."

MANTLO: Rom has never done that. If things happen, he confronts them. He's not averse to killing if he has to—he doesn't want to, but he will if he has to to defend either his own life or someone else's.

HOWELL: The series certainly has expanded in scope since that first run of issues.

MANTLO: I think starting with the wedding, the almost-wedding, I caught the book by whatever and just took off with it. The character came into his own, and everything began to work. It was almost instinctive, because I certainly wasn't planning it. I didn't really know what i was doing in terms of each issue. But something about the character made each issue work.

So we did the "*X-Men*" story, and we started getting letters saying, "Gee, thanks to *ROM*, I'm going to start buying the *X-MEN*." You don't see that at Marvel—it's X-Men this, X-Men that, Chris Claremont is God—but to get letters—not letter, *letters*—saying, "Gee, I never saw the X-Men before, but now I'll read them," on a book like *ROM*, pencilled and inked by Sal Buscema, it really floored me. That led me to believe that, for the first time, I was doing something right. Here was this writer making a book; it wasn't Byrne and Claremont, it wasn't Cockrum and Claremont, it wasn't Miller. It was a writer's book. *I* was selling this book. I was selling these stories. That's a good feeling to have. It's really confidence-building.

The Dire Wraiths are still there, even though they've been looking like Pillsbury Dough-boys lately. (I'm going to try to get Sal to change that image.) The problem with that was that we were told Parker Bros. was going to invent Dire Wraith toys. They never did. So we could only have the Wraiths in these transitional forms, assuming that there would be a form. Now, if there isn't one in the next couple months, I'm going to insist that we create it.

So we're going to start moving away from Clairton and on to other parts of the world, as he finds out Dire Wraiths.

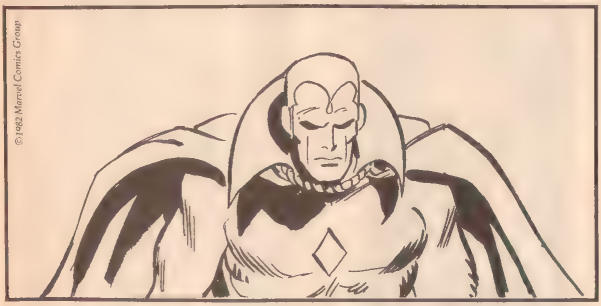
HOWELL: It seems to me that one of the biggest challenges you have faced in this book is to make the Dire Wraith threat continually different and interesting, since they do seem to be the same types of characters all the time. That sounds like an easy way for the book to fall into, say, the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants trap, of having the same threat every issue. But so far you've managed to keep expanding that, too.

MANTLO: I hope so. I hope once I can figure it out (whimpers), I can create some kind of a link between the Skrulls and the Wraiths. The problem with that is I'm never quite sure who the hell the Skrulls are, or the Kree, or any of that.

So I'm going to try to have somebody come up with a history of the Kree/Skrull thing, and tie the race to it, and maybe get into that—have two shape-shifter races at war with each other, with Earth as the battleground, and try to do, in *ROM*, an all-new Kree/Skrull war.

HOWELL: But without the Kree?

MANTLO: I don't know. That's a possibility. I want to talk to Shooter about this, and I've already mentioned a Rom/Avengers crossover, which he's very interested in. It seems to me that this could be the kind of epic that made that string of *AVENGERS* stories so powerful. I'd like to bring in the Kree/Skrull races; I'd like to bring in what's left of the Cotatai; I'd love to bring that into the story the Celestial Madonna, and really make it big. But I want to plan that very carefully.



And eventually—and I say this unblushingly (laughs)—eventually Rom will defeat the Wraiths. Then what does he do? The other problem is that now you've got Power Man and Iron Fist, the Fantastic Four, and the X-Men, who are aware of these creatures. I resent the fact that none of my fellow writers has chosen to mention this, and I hope that Jim Shooter and I will start to change that in *THE AVENGERS*. My fellow writers are all treating *ROM* as, "Oh, that turkey," and if that's their attitude, fine. But I'm trying to treat their books respectfully—doing their characters right when they appear. I hope Rom starts to appear in other places; I hope other characters start to wonder. Jo Duffy did a remarkable job in *POWER MAN*, treating the characters as he shoul dhave been treated. I'm going to try to get more of that going. In an upcoming issue, Rom fights the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. Now you've got the stituation where Earth villains encounter the race too, and they've got to start taking sides.

HOWELL: How about special projects?

MANTLO: Well, I've got the "*Vision/Scarlet Witch*" mini-series going...

HOWELL: Oh—you're writing that?

MANTLO: Yeah, as of the last artist switch. Rick Leonardi is drawing it. It's four parts. The first two parts are done. The first part is the Vision and the Scarlet Witch establishing themselves in a house away from Avengers Mansion. An ancient Druid arises out of one of Wanda's witchy tomes, trying to use her magic as a conduit to get back to Earth. And I'm trying in that story—which is a Halloween story, and features some altered trick-or-treaters—to get back to my gothic, ghostly image of the Vision. He encounters a ghost character who can essentially do what he does...pass through people and freeze them just by the sheer horror of himself. And for the Vision, it's taste-of-his-own-medicine time. If it's drawn as carefully as I plotted it—and I think Rick's a phenomenal artist—I think this could be a step in reviving the Vision and Scarlet Witch who have just become side characters.

HOWELL: They've fallen on some hard times.

MANTLO: Yeah. So I'd like to get back to the original Roy Thomas and Barry Smith aspect of the Vision. I'm hoping this will lead to a series.

The second part resolves the nonsense about the Whizzer thinking he's Wanda's father, and about Wanda's wandering brother. That deals with those two characters—the Whizzer dies, and Nuklo is de-powered. An old, old Golden Age villain called Isbisa serves as a fulcrum for all this.

HOWELL: Oh, him. The Ice Age-Stone Age guy.

MANTLO: Whatever, far as I know, he was only in the Stone Age. He was always in an asbestos suit.

HOWELL: He was in *ALL-WINNERS*, I think.

MANTLO: Right, in that one issue. So he's going to be the pivot point for all this.

I'm not sure. In the last two issues, what I'd like to do is Wanda and Pietro finding out that they know their father. I have to clear that through 2000 channels. I don't know what Byrne's doing with his Inhumans war—it's news to me; I'd never heard of it. Suddenly there's a war in the Himilayans...

HOWELL: I didn't think anybody knew where it was.

MANTLO: Yeah. So I don't know what's happening there.

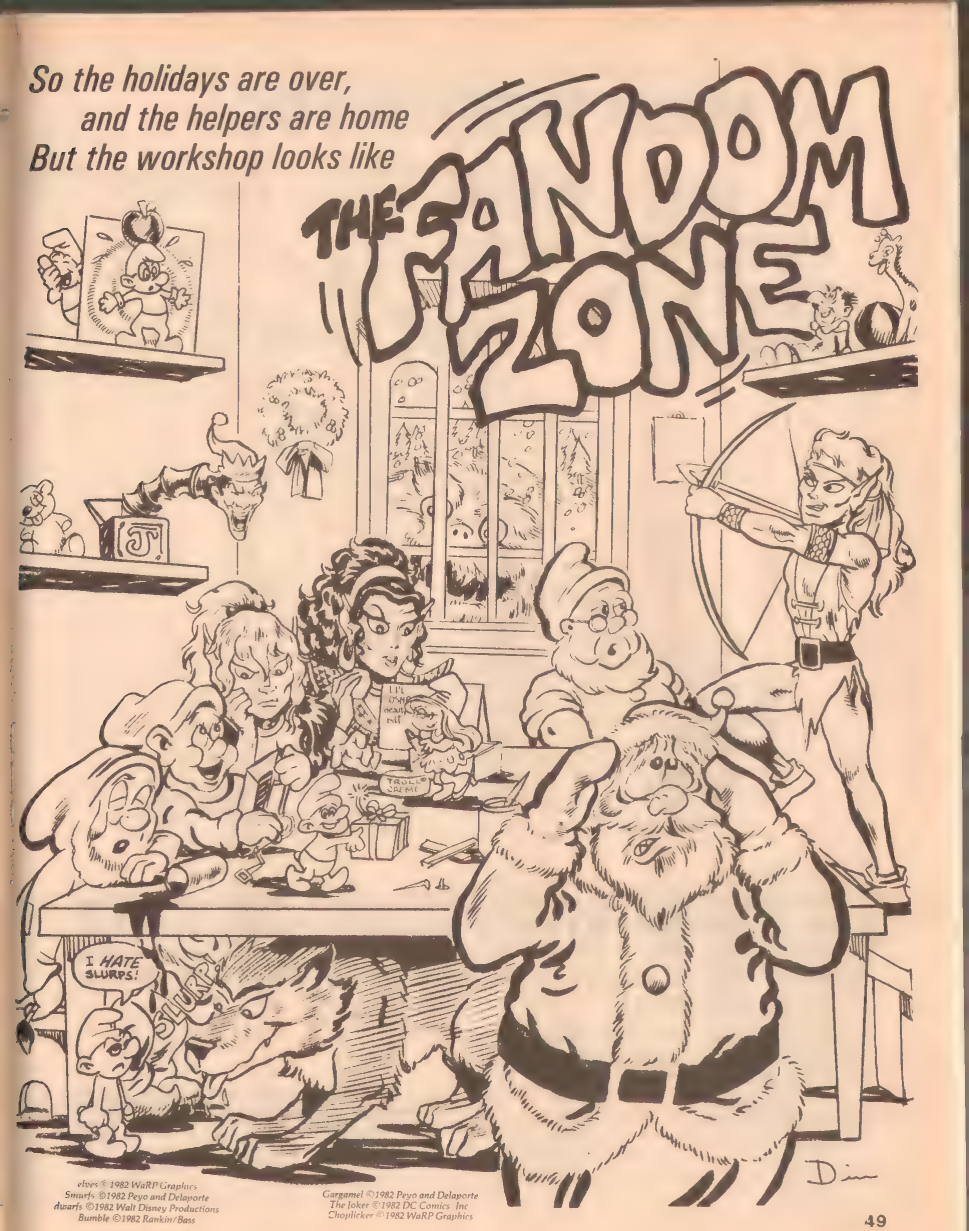
I want Quicksilver to join Wanda for two issues and lead them towards Magneto. And it seems to me that now that the X-Men are on Magneto's island, somebody should find some mention of Magda. So that's where that's going.

We've got Rocket Raccoon scheudled for a mini-series. We'll set up his keystone quadrant and all his guest characters. *All* of them first appear in the *HULK #271*.

There's also a "*Jack-of-Hearts*" mini-series, where we're going to revive that character and leave him in a position where he possibly can get a strip or not.

And then, one thing that's already written and drawn, Rick Leonardi and I did a gun control issue of Spider-Man, which will appear in either book; it doesn't matter, in which Spider-Man wrestles with the very controversial issue of gun control. Should handguns be allowed in the hands of the public or not? My decision is that they should not; Rick's position is that they should. We tried to balance the story, to show both sides and reasons for both sides. It was hard, because my bias is as anti-handgun, so I'm not sure; my feeling is that I probably slanted it too much toward my position. But it's going to be one of those issues that sit back and make people go, "Comics aren't reactionary. Marvel still deals with controversies." It's something we haven't done since the early 1970s.

I don't know when that's going to appear; it's written and drawn now. One suggestion for it is to turn one page of the book over to the National Coalition to Ban Handguns, and another over to the National Rifle Association, and let their representatives argue the merit of the story in the book—give them copies of the book before it's printed, and say, "Okay—what do *you* think?" And give both groups, who seem to reflect both sides of the issue, a chance in a comic book to address our readership directly and argue the merits of the story. So I'm hoping that it all comes out without any hitches. But it's one of the more powerful stories that I've ever done in a long while. ●



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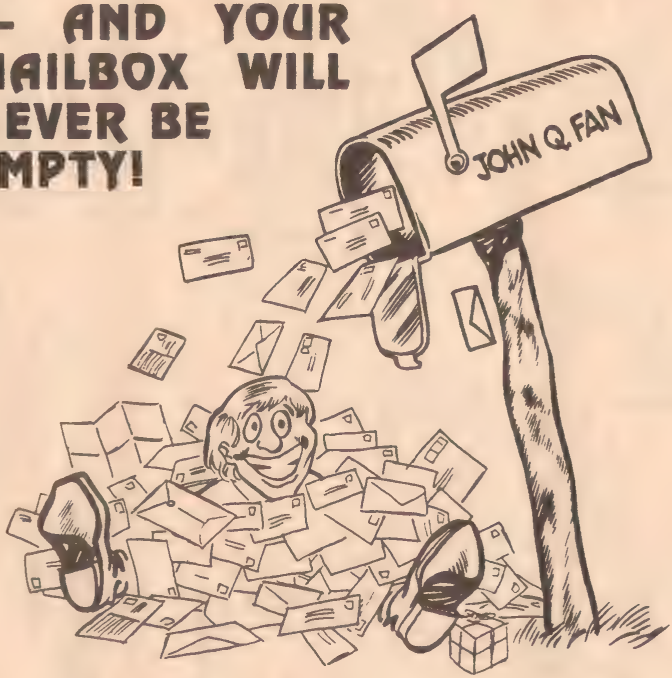

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Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall, #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, NJ. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00-9:00 p.m. Contact: Comics Club Maplewood, P.O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Mt. Prospect, IL. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Prospect High School, Room 130, 801 W. Kensington Rd., every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. Contact: R. Marr.

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Ken Gorman or Mike Berthiaume, P.O. Box 11336 Postal Station H, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2H 5Z0.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Ken Strack, N. 22nd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 992-3323.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eddie's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Ana-heim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

Rochester, NY. COMIC BOOK PEN PAL CLUB. Newsletter published. For info, contact: The Comic Book Man, 135 Glen Ellyn Way, Rochester, NY 14618.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00-4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Urbana, IL. CHAMPAIGN-URBANA COMIC CLUB. Meets at the Illinois Union Building, Room 215, 712 W. Illinois, Urbana, every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Contact: Mel DeSart.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X 1A8.

COMICS CONVENTIONS

March 7. Chicago Minicon. Americana-Congress Hotel, 520 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Admission is 75¢. For further information contact (312) 274-1832.

March 21. Super-Con. Howard Johnson's, 2 George St., Pawtucket, RI (Exit 27 off I-95). Admission in $1.00. For further information contact (401) 521-9343.

March 27-28. Dimension Convention. New York Statler Hilton, NY, NY. Guests include William Gaines, Harvey Kurtzman, Al Feldstein, Will Elder, Stan Lee, Marv Wolfman. Advance membership is $8.50 for both days before Dec. 31; $10.00 thereafter. For more information contact Dimension Conventions, c/o Esco, PO Box 400, Bronx, NY 10471.

April 18. Chicago Minicon. Americana-Congress Hotel, 520 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Il. Admission is 75¢. For further information contact (312) 274-1832.

May 14-16. Leprecon 8. Cravan Inn, 3333 E. Van Buren St., Phoenix, AZ. Guests include George Barr and William Rotsler. Wargaming, Panels, Masquerade, Films. Memberships are $8.00 in advance. For more information contact Leprecon 8, PO Box 14590, Phoenix, AZ 85063.

Qualified Praise

MODESTY'S FIRST AMERICAN EDITION

MODESTY BLAISE, Vols I-II, "First American Edition Series," Published by Ken Pierce and edited by Cat Yronwode, paperback, $5.95.

by Donna Ugol

Ken Pierce, who in the past has published reprint books of *SPIRIT* dailies and *LADY LUCK* Sundays, has come out with a new series of reprint books: the "First American Edition Series." He is using the books to reprint foreign strips not previously seen in this country. For his first two volumes, and his upcoming fourth volume, he has chosen what is reputably one of the finest adventure strips in the world: *MODESTY BLAISE.*

MODESTY BLAISE is a British comic strip written by Peter O'Donnell (who created the character) and drawn by Jim Holdaway (until Holdaway's death in 1970; there has been a succession of artists since then). Modesty Blaise is ususally referred to as a "female James Bond," but O'Donnell's strong characterization lifts her from the pits of cliche and swipe. There have been a couple of tries at syndicating the strip in America (the Los Angeles Times Syndicate was distributing the strip from 1976 until September 4th of this year), but they failed because the American comic strip syndication market was not flexible enough to overcome the stylistic differences between British and American strips. (*MODESTY BLAISE* has longer story-lines and more mature themes and treatments than most American continuity strips.)

However, the strip has appeared in America to a sufficient extent to garner fans. The "First American Edition Series" *MODESTY BLAISE* books therefore have a ready-made market, composed of a demand with no regular supply.

The "F.A.E.S." *MODESTY BLAISE* books are square-bound paperbacks about the size of a conventional comic book. They retail for $5.95. They each reprint two complete *MODESTY BLAISE* stories: *"Top Traitor"* and *"The Vikings"* in #1, *"The Mind of Mrs. Drake"* and *"Uncle Happy"* in #2. They are printed on slick white paper with splendidly solid black ink. The size at which the strips are reprinted (roughly 6½" x 2") is unfortunately too small for full appreciation of Holdaway's delicate linework, even though this is most likely the size at which the strips were originally designed to be printed.

The exteriors are adequate but unimpressive. Since the first book is bright red and the second is bright green, they are easily told apart. However, the cover art is so nearly identical on the two books (a large head of Modesty on a solid black background) that one needs a side-by-side comparison to spot the difference. (Q. Can you spot the difference between these two drawings? A. One of the women is holding a gun; the other is not.)

The two books also include a checklist of *"Modesty Blaise"* stories up to *"The Lady Killers"* (presumably the current story) by Cat Yronwode (fan critic, columnist for *THE BUYER'S GUIDE*, and editor of the *MODESTY BLAISE VOLUMES*), briefly analyzes some of the critical perceptions of Modesty Blaise: "female James Bond," "fallen

The "Modesty Blaise" volumes are eminently worth a look.
"...O'Donnell's strong characterization lifts her from the pits of cliche..."
MODESTY BLAISE
by PETER O'DONNELL
THE VIKINGS
TOP TRAITOR

woman," and "prototypical twentieth-century fantasy heroine." The second, by Chris Claremont (writer for Marvel Comics), includes his own perceptions of the character: "a role model," "an ideal," "the best there is." (This second piece may be of interest to fans of Marvel's *X-MEN*, because the origin which Claremont gave to Len Wein and Dave Cockrum's creation Storm is very similar to the origin which O'Donnell had (previously) created for Modesty.)

As far as I can tell, the books (advertised in *THE BUYER'S GUIDE* and distributed to the comics shops) are designed solely for the fan market. It may be hoped that Mr. Pierce will at least attempt to bring them to the popular market, since the strip was well-received by adults in the cities in which it saw syndication. ●

character ©1981 Marvel Comics Group

X-MEN MARVEL INDEX

by Dennis Perado

Well, the new Marvel Comics Index is finally out, and it looks terrific! The Brent Anderson/Terry Austin/Steve Oliff cover is wonderful (the back cover part less so), and the overall package is painstakingly complete, well-designed, and an invaluable research aid—to those who actually have any reason to research *X-MEN* comics, *CHAMPIONS*, *GHOST RIDER*, etc. This is a limited recommendation for that reason, since I've never yet found a fact in these books I didn't already know myself, and frequently found stuff excluded from them that I think should be included. It's true, however, that a good deal of effort goes into finding out who did the lettering overlays on the reprint covers, coloring on stories, and all sorts of stuff that I don't find particularly thrilling myself, but I can appreciate as pure research.

There were some odd omissions and poorly cross-referenced material here and there. You can't (for instance) convince me that Jack Kirby did not fully pencil the cover of issue #17—and it's clear (though uncredited) that Kirby pencilled that issue's splash page solo. Also, Kirby had nothing to do with several later covers (#35 and #37, for instance) with which he is credited for layouts. Also, in the character rundowns at the beginning, the occasional editorializing ("brilliant stories" used in the Marvel Girl section, for instance) creates a strange atmosphere in which only the facts are being recounted—except for exceptions. I vote the opinions stay *out* of the factual sections.

This *"Marvel Index"* raises some interesting questions, since the *X-MEN* is one of the most re-written series Marvel produces. In general, Olshevsky and Frutti (plus additional data-men Lou Mougin, Murray Ward, and Dennis Mallonee) take the information given in the comics pretty much at face value. This is cool, since what's in the comics is supposed to be what the whole *"Marvel Index"* series is about. The problem is, some material in the later issues of the *X-MEN* comics contradicts earlier information. Olshevsky and company usually assume that the earlier entry is correct (he notes, for instance, Candy Sothern's name is mis-spelled in her later appearances in #132 on, and assumes that Jean Grey's gravestone is mis-inscribed, since it provides a birth date which would have made Jeannie 7 years old at the time of *X-MEN #1*). In *X-MEN #138*, though, there is a recounting of several scenes in the X-Men's past, and several are dead wrong. A check of #10 will reveal that Cyclops was miles away from the scene when Marvel Girl was being threatened by a Tyrannosaurus Rex, and thus couldn't have felt so much for her at that moment that he fell in love with her (which is pretty ridiculous anyway, if you think about it). Secondly, in #138, Cyclops remembers a scene, supposedly from issue #32, in which he and Jean Grey throw themselves into each other's arms and declare their mutual undying love. That scene is assigned in the *"X-MEN Index"* as taking place off-panel in issue #32. Not so!

It just couldn't'a happened! In #33, remember, Jean is quietly surprised that Scott would choose her for a mission which could only accomodate two X-People, and wonders if he might care for her, too. Scott quietly wonders the same thing (the original X-Men's tradition of "sad thought balloons" continued unabated). Scott continued to worry about Jean's collegiate boyfriend in #34. As of the split-up into teams to avert world disaster in #38, there was no apparent voiced love between Cyclops and Marvel Girl, etc. It's true that the apparent death of Professor X broke down a few barriers between the couple, but no mention was made of them as lovers (even in the Code-approved sense). In #46, Jean wonders whether the split-up of the X-Men will mean the last time she will see Scott—or whether he'll come after her. Is that the reaction of a young woman to whom her suitor has

declared undying love less than (probably) three months before? My opinion is that if that scene in the recap happened at *all*, it was between #46 and #48 (in which Cyclops and Marvel Girl appeared as a duo—and stayed that way forever after. At the time, I remember commenting on the obvious increased intimacy between the two. Obviously the big change was there).

So this is almost an academic problem with the case of "continuity implants" (as they were referred to in *RAMPAGING HULK* magazine—and what's going to happen to the X-Men's appearance in *RAMPAGING HULK*'s legitimacy now that the events in that magazine have been stated to be an alien movie production). It almost comes down to a question of whether Roy Thomas and Werner Roth were mistaken about the course of characters and events when they produced *X-MEN #32* (and the subsequent authors and artists were similarly benighted when they produced #33-66), or were Claremont and Byrne embellishing the truth in #138. The events in the *"New X-Men"* series don't really affect us older (I'm 31) readers anyway, since we assume that the events in the new series have no relation to the old one (like Earth-One and Earth-Two divisions), but it gets to be very subjective when the New X-Men's history interferes with established facts in the original X-Men's career. Part of the problem is a scripter who either didn't read or doesn't like the earlier issues (and so contradicts them whenever the mood strikes him), but certainly the index series should be aware of the necessity for judging these points empirically.

All that notwithstanding, the *X-MEN INDEX* is a superior production, and worth buying. You never know how much you *don't* know about a group like this (or how much the current creators never knew either) until you read it.●

THE JUSTICE MACHINE

by Carl Docks

THE JUSTICE MACHINE #2, $2.25, available at comics shops.

THE JUSTICE MACHINE is an essentially entertaining book, whose main problem is lack of background for newcomers.

The splash panel gives us some expository information: the local bunch of super-heroes was framed for conspiracy. The series takes place in a *1984*-esque world, and the Justice Machine has essentially gone underground to try and prove its innocence.

There are still a few things I don't understand, though. The setting is "Georwell," obviously a play on George Orwell's name; is Georwell a location on Earth or is it elsewhere? During what period is this taking place? The future of "our" Earth? Now, on a parallel world? The concepts are easier to grasp if you're just coming in with this issue, but a disorientation still exists.

Once you're past that, though, you're in for a reasonably good story. It's part *1984*, part *MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER*, and part original *X-MEN*, and still reasonably fresh.

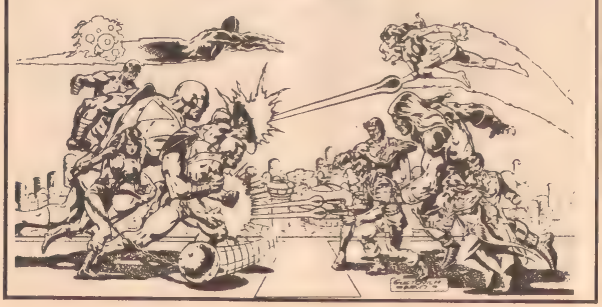
JUSTICE MACHINE's biggest problem to my eyes is that it seems to move too quickly. Again, this may be because I came in an issue late and missed fairly important information—but publishers can't assume that all the readers know everything about the series. Whether or not that is the case, in this early stage of a series' life, I'd like to see more character work (there's some well-done character exposition at the beginning), leaving the heavy-duty action for future issues.

The coloring looks as if it had been done with a combination of Dr. Martin's dyes and colored pencils. The latter is an interesting experiment; I enjoy working with colored pencils myself, and on the right type of artwork, some very nice effects can be achieved. It doesn't seem to work when translated to the four-color process, though. I hate to do it, but I have to recommend that they stick to more standard coloring methods.

The art itself varies, thanks to the company's policy of switching penciller/inker combinations on every chapter. It remains fairly fluid and open, though. There aren't really any signs of creative genius, but for the most part the story is easy to follow and the pencillers use enough variety in their shots to keep the scenes from getting overly static.

You'll have a relatively easy time getting into this book if you can't find the first issue, but as with all multi-part books, you need to read several installments to discover whether or not you like it. *JUSTICE MACHINE* is definitely worth a try to see if it's the type of comic book which appeals to you.

The *"Justice Machine"* characters.



OLD FANS

(with a tip of the Beany-cap copter to Simon and Garfunkel)

--Murray R. Ward

Remember when Hulk and Iron Man were grey
For only one issue, or half a day
In the Marvel Universe scheme of time?

When Green Arrow shaved his chin, and when
Flash clocked his speed at Roomer-10,
And the Yancy Street Gang bugged Bashful Ben,
And love was in bloom and the world in rhyme?

When Sgt. Rock made his first battle plan,
And "Thomes" or "Levitz" or "Shooter" meant "fan,"
And nobody wrote like Fox and the Man,
And Dr. Strange was a flash-in-the-pan,
And Spidey by Ditko the walls did climb?

When Superman was your father's age,
And a Schwartz revival the latest rage,
And Rawhide Kid saved the Tombstone stage,
And Black meant Panther, but not Luke Cage,
And comics were less then a cent a page,
Oh do you remember that hour sublime?

O gather ye warriors, for we are the last,
Who still remember that glorious past,
When JLA gained an All-Star cast,
When Dibny and Olsen and Richards got Plas'd,
And the Challs by their children first got sassed,
And Paste-Pot's glue held the poor Torch fast,
And bank robbery was the height of crime.

When Supergirl's costume still was a skirt,
And only Nick Fury ripped off his shirt,
And heroines never did more than flirt,
We had signal-watches, not Troub-Alert,
And no one got "wasted," or "done dirt,"
Or killed, or crippled, or even hurt,
No Howard the Duck, just a Swan named Curt,
And life was ice-cream and lemon-lime.

When villains were evil and stories were pat,
(Who here can still remember that?),
When Bruce Wayne marvelled to spy a bat,
And Professor X and the Chief just sat,
When Zap was a sound-effect, just like Splat,
And no one had heard of Fat Freddy's Cat,
Or Pudge, Girl Blimp, or Stewart the Rat,
And Wonder Woman's chest was flat,
And monsters were solid, not made of slime.

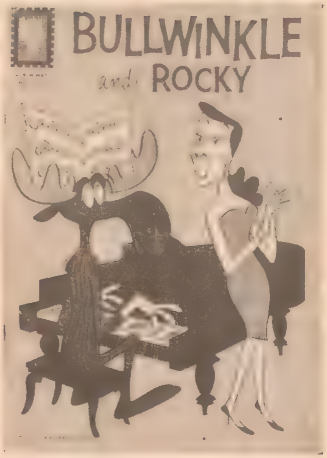
When the new Green Lantern was still quite green
(Wet behind the ears, if you know what I mean),
And dead Shazam did vent his spleen,
Sending Fly and Fatman upon the scene.
There's been good and bad and in-between,
Since the days of the Jaguar and Katy Keene,
But now we have full-color magazines,
The Hulk on the tube, Superman on the screen,
And I just heard a young fan loudly keen,
"I remember when comics only cost two dimes."

Just so that no one misunderstands, I'm not knocking the comics of the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike some, I'm still having fun with my hobby, same as ever. But, as Isaac Asimov once pointed out, the Golden Age of anything is when the one remembering it as such is young—say, in his teens, between puberty and the ability to vote. The so-called Silver Age of Comics was *my* Golden Age, and that of most of the staff of *COMICS FEATURE* as well, and here I pay tribute to those long hours of terrific reading.

As a parting shot, I offer my own Silver Sixties, Woodstock-approved no-prize to the first fan who writes in and correctly identifies the dates and issues referred to in each line of the above poetic (?) offering. ●

send to:
Murray R. Ward
PO Box 3693
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2W 3R6

20 Years Ago this Month



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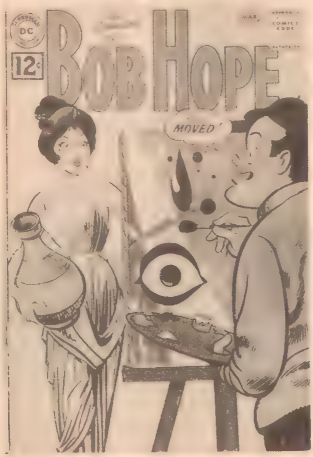

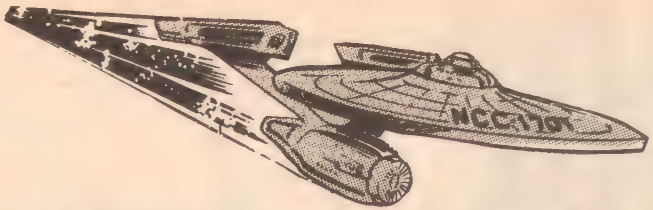

ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS

ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS is where the Star Trek fan can journey to have his wildest dreams fulfilled. *EI* is now in its fifth year of publication and has now hit a regular quarterly schedule. Being so close to Los Angeles, it is the only major ST zine with access to the personalities and artists responsible for the continuing ST saga as evidenced by our early reports on the film and our recent interviews with Dorothy Fontana and Greg Jein. Future issues will include a spectacular feature on the designs and props done for *ST:TMP* by *Brick Price 'Miniatures* (who built the ships for *Project: UFO* and other shows) as well as an article by Dorothy Fontana on her Star Trek animated episode, "Yesteryear" with special artwork accompanying it done especially for *EI* by Ron Wilber.

EI also covers the world of fan fiction and it examines not only the trends in this sub-genre and reviews the best work available, but it also presents its own ST fiction to help fill the demand by fans who feel cheated by the juvenilia published by Bantam Books. In fact, *EI #9* has an exhaustive article reviewing all of the Bantam Star Trek novels and we pull no punches in our critical study of these less than talented exercises.

Enterprise Incidents is written by Star Trek fans for Star Trek fans. It goes out of its way to find features that no one else is doing and that the editors want very much to see themselves. They love Star Trek and their enthusiasm shows because they want to be just as excited by each issue as the reader, and they're tough to please!

EI has many regular features such as "The Star Trek Archives" (which features reprints of ST oriented articles from the past and from abroad), "The Star Trek Bloopers" (Over eighty blooper photos have been published since *EI #2* and more are being found all the time!) plus cartoons and other artwork. No matter what you might think, *EI* has no trouble coming up with interesting and imaginative features!

If you are a Star Trek fan, then you mustn't miss a single issue of *Enterprise Incidents*. Subscribe today! Four quarterly magazines, all with color covers, can be yours for only $12.00.

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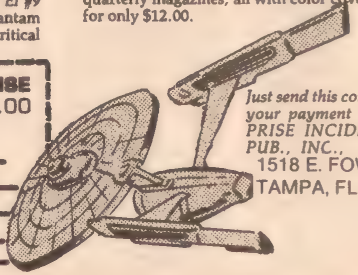

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Drawing by Hannah Shapero

WOMEN AND POWER IV

dark phoenix

AND THE

by Margaret O'Connell

In our last installment, we left editors shouting words of encouragement and scripters with an eye for the main chance jumping on the chaos-bringer bandwagon as throngs of Marvel's most formidable super-heroines freaked out in blood-thirsty fits of power-madness. We also left the readers, whose apparent eagerness to buy comics featuring stories like the *"Dark Phoenix Saga"* did much to intensify this trend, displaying a rather startling unconcern over the fact that in these stories, characters who were supposed to be good guys in fact acted more like villains—genocidal villains, in Dark Phoenix's case. Even those reader/LOC-writers who expressed indignation over the untimely death of Jean Grey often seemed angry because one of their favorite characters had been killed, but undisturbed by the fact that before her death, Jean had been inexorably transformed from a long-established morally upright heroine into a destructive villainess, with precious little motivational justification.

Obviously, the audience not only found the idea of good guys becoming life-threatening menaces for little apparent reason acceptable, but was downright eager to read about what happens when they do. As a result of this, the "super-heroine as chaos-bringer" trend, which began with the introduction of Phoenix/Dark Phoenix into the New X-Men (in issue #101) and originally affected only extremely high-powered female superheroes (who were portrayed as tripping out on the *hubris*-inducing effects of their own more-than-human power to the point where they began to regard lesser mortals as mere insects, and acted accordingly), has now evolved into a broader, more all-encompassing, trend. At this point, any Marvel super-hero, male or female, cosmic-powered or insignificant, is liable to turn villain for a day—or, if Jim Shooter's announced plans for the hapless Hank (Yellow-jacket) Pym are fully carried out, for the rest of comic-book eternity.

This "pro-villainy" trend at Marvel is only a small part of a much larger cultural phenomenon. Comics readers are far from the only ones to be sur-

prime-time vixens

prisingly receptive to—and, in the case of a character like Wolverine before his recent rehabilitation, downright enthusiastic about—"heroes" who behave in what would conventionally be considered a dastardly fashion. As a recent article in *PARADE* magazine pointed out ("*The New Super Villains*," by Peter H. Brown, April 12, 1981), what one expert categorizes as out-and-out "villain worship" has become increasingly evident in both television and the movies in the past two or three years. From Darth Vader (who gets twice as much fan mail as all the *STAR WARS* good guys put together) to J. R. Ewing (who gets anything he wants), villains are literally stealing the show. "It's become a stampede," said a spokesman for the William Morris Agency quoted in the article. "Every studio and network is looking for fresh bad guys, and stars are clamoring for the nasty roles that everybody used to turn down." "There's no doubt about it—people find it easier and more interesting to identify with the bad guys right now," concluded Steve Arvin, whose company, Cinemascore, polls thousands of film-goers every week to produce audience ratings of films for studios and cable networks.

In Arvin's opinion, the reason for all this is that "[there is something] missing in our society that these villains compensate for. Because of this, the bad guys are becoming the real super-stars." Professor James Rhem of the University of Wisconsin agrees: "I think we can identify easily with bad guys like J.R. because we are all so thwarted in all directions these days. That makes us frustrated with few outlets... So we cheer for J.R." This diagnosis seems to be confirmed by the statistics. The author of the *PARADE* article found that "A study of ratings for network television shows that [audience interest in] the nastiness on *DALLAS* and later on [*DALLAS*' spinoff] *KNOTS LANDING* began to peak during the Iranian hostage dilemma."

In the light of this, the explanation offered by actress Lana Turner, famous for the villainous roles she played in numerous 1940s films (most notably the original version of *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE*), seems likely

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Larry Hagman as the tyrannical J.R. of *DALLAS*, who supposedly embodies viewers' wishes to be "reasonably evil and not get punished."

to be substantially correct: "I think people are so enraptured by villains because they want to feel the power the villains have." As Leonard Katzman (one of the creators of *DALLAS*) told *PARADE*, "We began to see that a lot of people would love to be able to do what [J.R.] does and to get away with it...to be reasonably evil and not be punished."

According to a recent *TV GUIDE* article about the popular villainesses of several *DALLAS*-like evening soap operas ("*Prime-Time Vixens*," by Mark Jonathan Harris, July 11-17, 1981), prime-time soap opera "bad girls" like Constance of *FLAMINGO ROAD*, Fallon of *DYNASTY*, and Abby of *KNOTS LANDING* have special appeal for female viewers—and not just as the traditional villains you love to hate, either. If the people who read the fan mail are to be believed, these women viewers see the "prime-time vixens" as positive role models, remaining as blind to the destructive nature of their actions as the comics fan who eagerly devoured tales of wanton slaughter committed by "heroes" like Dark Phoenix and Wolverine. *DYNASTY* co-creator Esther Shapiro says of that show's vixen-in-chief, "Most women who write to us want to be Fallon. We don't perceive her as a bitch, and apparently they don't either. She's a creature of the 1980s, trying to sort out her life. Women identify with her."

Since the *TV GUIDE* article describes Fallon as having "not only had affairs with her [millionaire] father's business rival and the family chauffeur, but [probably also with] the members of her father's football team," this seems rather alarming, to say the least. However, according to Morgan Fairchild, who plays the role of Constance, "the spoiled and spiteful Southern vixen of NBC's *FLAMINGO ROAD*," what really attracts the viewers is such characters' sheer guts and assertiveness, qualities which are rare in women portrayed on TV: "Bitches do what good girls want to do but aren't allowed to. They can be assertive, lusty; act for themselves; they're catalysts. I think that's why people like them so much: because they try to take control of their own lives... to be honest, bitches are more fun. They don't make nice ladies very interesting in Hollywood. Good girls are put on pedestals where they can't move. If they do move, usually they fall off and become victims."

The range of female characters is not quite this limited in comic books, where many of the "good" women are specifically identified as super-heroines, and therefore are at least theoretically capable of action and heroism in their own right. But although the super-hero comics of the last few years have featured increasing numbers of non-pedestal-sitting women as being actively enrolled on the side of the angels, such characters are all too often portrayed as having unappealingly overbearing personalities, even when they do not actually cross the line dividing mere offensiveness from Dark Phoenix or She-Hulk-style destructiveness. The general obnoxiousness of even relatively self-controlled high-powered Marvel heroines would appear to imply that although it may be possible for a woman to be powerful and assertive without forfeiting her status as an officially-designated good guy, it is not possible for her to display these "unfemininely" strong qualities and still be what would conventionally be considered "a nice lady" (or even a nice person). The polarization between innocuous but weak female characters like the Dazzler, the pre-Claremont Spider-Women, Clea, the Wasp, and the Invisible "Girl," and abrasive, but useful-in-a-fight, characters like Moondragon, Black Widow, Ms. Marvel, and Her demonstrates that in comics, as on television, the tendency is to believe that a woman can be either a "nice lady" who passively sits on a pedestal, or an assertive bitch who insists on acting on her own. The main difference is that in comics, she can be a bitch who fights for truth, justice, and the American way even as she steps on everyone else's toes.

This is not much of an improvement. It does have the virtue of showing that even a pushy, tactless woman can still be basically well-intentioned on some level (which has a certain usefulness for the many female readers who were brought up to believe that hurting other people's feelings or getting angry at them is unconscionably cruel and heartless no matter what the provocation or the right and wrong of the situation). However, for those who have gotten past the stage of fearing that any non-conciliatory remark is likely to expose them to charges of ingrained nastiness and narcissistic egotism, or who never experienced such a stage in the first place, abrasive "heroines" who go around insulting everyone who looks at them funny, forcibly brainwashing people who hold what they consider immoral beliefs (as Moondragon did to Quicksilver in *AVENGERS #175*), or zapping first and asking questions later (like Her in *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #61-63*), are almost worse than no role models at all.

* * *

It would be simplistic to suggest that any one cause fully accounts for the audience enthusiasm for TV and comic-book heroines who are both conspicuously assertive and alarmingly unscrupulous. In part, it seems to be merely another aspect of the favorable audience response accorded any recent

character, male or female, who is able to take charge and successfully go after whatever he or she wants, even—or especially—if this involves walking all over anyone who gets in the way. The fact that such unregenerate male protagonists as J.R. Ewing and the pre-"rehabilitation" Wolverine are at least as popular as any of the female TV and comics characters we have been discussing suggests that it may indeed be true that, to quote Morgan Fairchild again, "people [in general]... don't believe in nice-guy heroes any more. They believe the nice guy is the one who gets stepped on."

Whether people really do believe this and approve of it, or are simply desperate enough to settle for what few energetic, effective role models are offered them, is a question which is particularly relevant to a consideration of the special affinity many women TV viewers are said to feel for the "prime-time vixens"—an affinity which would appear to involve additional factors specifically related to the gender of both the viewers and the villainesses. Most of the recipients of such shows' fan mail seem to agree that while women are especially liable to identify with or want to emulate the scheming females of the evening soap operas, they simultaneously appear oblivious of or indifferent to the immorality of the characters' actions. So do the TV personnel who created them, if one can judge by the essentially sympathetic way some of these characters, notably Abby of *KNOTS LANDING*, are portrayed on screen, and by the positive tone of the actresses' and producers' comments about them (Morgan Fairchild notes approvingly that her character "isn't sitting and whimpering because her husband has run off with another woman... She's trying to do something about it—to drive that whore out of town and save her marriage").

This contrasts noticeably with the attitudes of both the producers and the audience toward the corresponding male figure, J.R. Unlike Esther Shapiro, the co-creator of *DYNASTY* who claimed not to perceive that show's rapacious heiress "heroine" as a bitch, *DALLAS* producer/writer/director Leonard Katzman is under no illusions about the dubious morality of his show's much-admired hero-villain. Katzman admits quite frankly that J.R. is evil, going on to explain that the ruthless oil tycoon "is strong and necessary evil for the weaker family members in *DALLAS*...We didn't do any audience surveys about J.R. We just came to the creative conclusion that J.R. would do anything to look good in his daddy's eyes." Apparently the nature of the enthusiastic audience response the producers got as a result of this decision left no doubt that the viewers, too, were well aware of J.R.'s vileness, since, as quoted earlier, Katzman summarized that response by stating, "A lot of people would love to be able... to be reasonably evil and not be punished."

According to actress Morgan Fairchild, "people [in general] ...don't believe in nice-guy heroes anymore. They believe the nice guy is the one who gets stepped on."

photo © 1982 Triangle Publications. Originally published in TV GUIDE as part of the "Prime-Time Vixens" article, used in this article's text. Used without permission.

The producers' and audience's conscious awareness that J.R., the epitome of male villainy on the evening soap operas, is a thoroughly nasty fellow, contrasts significantly with the more ambivalent and almost amoral attitude taken toward the behavior of the "prime-time vixens" by both their creators and their supposed hordes of female fans and would-be imitators. Though J.R. appears to be popular precisely because he is utterly villainous, the moral fussiness of the "vixen"-fanciers' vision of their heroines suggests that whatever attraction the specific unscrupulousness of these female characters might have for their fans pales into insignificance beside the more unusual (for a female TV character) characteristic to which Morgan Fairchild attributed their essential appeal: their assertiveness. Similarly, the muddleheaded utterances of the actresses (who jump at the chance to play "prime-time vixens" primarily because they're tired of the helpless victim roles that are the only alternative) and the producers (who, though hopelessly vague about everything else, appear convinced that the one character element crucial to the making of a successful TV portrayal of a female "creature of the [19]80s" is aggression) might well lead one to conclude that what they really wanted to create all along was simply dynamic, active female characters. None of the creative personnel involved seems to have had any particular interest in putting genuinely wicked women up there on the small screen as distaff moral equivalents of J.R.—they were just too hidebound by the traditional stereotypes to think of any way of presenting assertive female characters without making them seem bitchy or otherwise subtly morally suspect.

But if what the fans of "prime-time vixens"—and the analogously-situated fans of high-powered comic-book heroines who inevitably turn out to be either obnoxiously overbearing or downright destructive—really want is active female role models presented in a positive light, why are they apparently willing to accept these media's persistent equation of assertive women with what would conventionally be considered bitches? Why aren't the female fans, especially, clamoring loudly for genuinely positive presentations of assertive women as an alternative to the passive pedestal-sitters and active, but morally unappealing, vixen/"heroines" female characters are still routinely divided into? Perhaps it is because the idea that it is not only inappropriate, but just plain wrong, for women to be active, powerful, or successful in traditionally male ways is so deeply ingrained in people's psyches by society that even women who consciously reject the ideal of feminine passivity and ineffectuality on some level expect there to be something more or less seriously wrong about an assertive and conspicuously capable woman.

This expectation of wrongness is built into most people's perceptions of powerful women to such an extent that it can be very difficult for even the most self-consciously feminist comics creators to come up with a super-heroine no more fatally flawed than her male colleagues, no matter how hard they try. But since the readers' expectations of a female character are just as biased as her creator's, often this not only goes unnoticed by the audience, but—if the character's flaws are flashy and "liberated" enough—is initially greeted with applause.

Jean Grey of the New X-Men is a particularly striking example of a fictional character who might almost have been designed for the express purpose of gratifying the female readers' desire for charismatically attractive images of female power, while simultaneously playing upon their submerged fears that for women, such power inevitably leads to disaster. In Jean, the conflict between the comics creators' and the audience's wish to finally see a female character wielding heavy-duty super-powers on a grand scale and their subconscious misgivings about whether someone as supposedly irrational as a woman could actually be trusted with such power is projected onto the character herself in the form of Jean's continuing internal conflict between the intense fulfillment she derives from using her Phoenix powers (which makes her want to use them more and more), and her fear of the disastrous excesses this may lead to. This persistent motif of Jean's internal conflict and self-doubt gives the character an appealing aura of psychological realism as far as certain kinds of female readers are concerned, since for many such readers, Jean's mingled joy in and fear of her own power have the familiar ring of truth, seeming to reflect the readers' own experience.

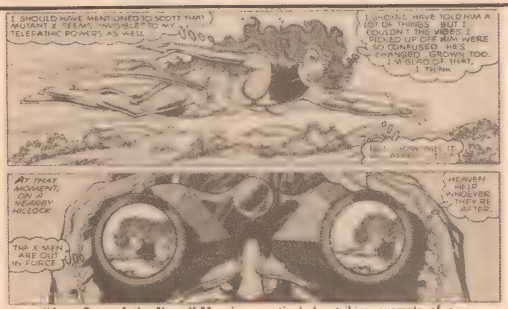
As psychologist Matina Horner's research shows, many of the most capable and achievement-oriented young women experience tremendous anxiety at the thought of exercising their full intelligence and ability, especially in public, since "the girl who is motivated to achieve is defying conventions of what girls 'should' do... Consciously or unconsciously the girl equates... achievement with loss of femininity" and with becoming an unloved freak shunned and scorned by all (Horner, *"Fail: Bright Women,"* reprinted in *THE BORZOI COLLEGE READER*, 4th edition, pp. 417-422). Like Jean Grey, who became obsessed with the idea that her vast Phoenix power would warp her into a perverse, power-mad parody of her original upright self long before there seemed to be any realistic possibility of this happening, the young women Horner describes are haunted by "the fear that success in competitive achievement situations will lead to drastically negative consequences, such as unpopularity and loss of femininity." Many of the young women in Horner's study envisioned these negative consequences in almost ludicrously melodramatic terms, as can be seen by the responses they gave when asked to tell a story based on the sentence, "After first-term finals, Anne finds herself at the top of her medical school class." Instead of displaying unequivocal delight at Anne's success and predicting further triumphs and a rosy future for her, as one might expect (and as happened with over 90 per cent of the 88 young men asked to perform the same exercise, starting with a similar sentence about a male medical student), over 65 per cent of the 90 young women in Horner's sample wrote stories in which the fictitious Anne's impressive achievements resulted in her being ostracized by her peers, having a nervous breakdown, dropping out of medical school, deliberately lowering her grades so she won't score higher than her boyfriend, or some other equally unpalatable outcome. Perhaps the most alarming of these scenarios is the one Horner quoted at the beginning of her article:

> Anne starts proclaiming her surprise and joy [at reaching the head of the class]. Her fellow classmates are so disgusted with her behavior that they jump on her in a body and beat her. She is maimed for life.

It beats annihilating several billion sentient beings and then committing suicide to save the universe from yourself, but not by much.

Thus, the apocalyptic sense of impending doom inspired by even the most ridiculously trivial and innocuous use of Jean Grey's Phoenix powers (as was demonstrated in Part III of this article last issue) can be seen as a four-color version of a fear-of-success sufferer's hyperbolic nightmare visions of the consequences of female power and achievement. Whether this was at all intentional on the comics creators' parts is impossible to ascertain. However, it does seem probable that the particular form of the disaster which overtook Jean as a result of her "excessive" powers was at least partially inspired by the fate of a Dark Phoenix-like character in the Darkover books of Marion Zimmer Bradley, a science fiction writer whom *"New X-Men"* scripter Chris Claremont has identified as "hav[ing] a lot of the same ideas [(about psychic powers) as I do], the problem being hers saw print first" (Interview with Chris Claremont, *THE COMICS JOURNAL #50*, p. 49).

Phoenix/Dark Phoenix is in many ways strikingly similar to Bradley's Sharra, a human woman turned elemental being who was once worshipped as a fire goddess by the people of Darkover, and who is still capable of being summoned forth out of her disembodied state in a sort of Phantom Zone-like alien dimension of exile by certain psychic rituals (as told by Marion Zimmer Bradley, *THE SWORD OF ALDONES*, first published 1962, pp. 86, 170, and presumably in greater detail in Bradley's forthcoming *THE BINDING OF SHAR-*


I SHOULD HAVE MENTIONED TO SCOTT THAT MUTANT X SEEMS INVISIBLE TO MY TELEPATHIC POWERS AS WELL
...WHILE I HAVE TOLD HIM A LOT OF THINGS BUT I COULDN'T TELL HIM THAT I SEALED UP OFF HIM WERE SO CONFUSED HE'S CHANGED, GROWN TOO. I'M GLAD OF THAT, I THINK.
AT THAT MOMENT, ON A NEARBY MESA
HEAVEN HELP WHOEVER THEY'RE AFTER.
THE X-MEN ARE OUT IN FORCE

"Jean Grey of the New X-Men is a particularly striking example of a fictional character who might almost have been designed for the express purpose of... playing upon fears that for women, such power inevitably leads to disaster."

©1982 Marvel Comics Group

RA(?)). Like Phoenix/Dark Phoenix, Sharra is an amoral bringer of fiery destruction who will eventually turn on anyone who summons her, no matter how noble or altruistic their purpose. "The Phoenix is a cosmic power. It can neither be contained nor controlled—especially by a human vessel" (*X-MEN #137*, pp. 44-45). Sharra, too, if "a force basically beyond human control... there are some powers so strong, so far from ordinary human purpose, that they warp all things to evil. Or to evil in ordinary human terms, at least" Marion Zimmer Bradley, *THE HERITAGE OF HASTUR*, first published in 1975, pp. 210-211). Even Bradley's description of Sharra in action sounds something like a cross between the flaming-haired Phoenix herself and Phoenix's gigantic, fiery Phoenix-effect: "A looming, towering form of fire, a woman's form, chained in gold, rising, flaming, striking...a golden goddess, flame-clothed, flame-crowned, golden-chained, burning, glowing, blazing, consuming..." (*HERITAGE OF HASTUR*, pp. 219, 266).

Sharra ©1982 by Marion Zimmer Bradley; this depiction is the painted cover of DAW Books' SHARRA'S EXILE, and is by regular FEATURE contributor Hannah Shapero.

"Like Phoenix/Dark Phoenix, Sharra is an amoral bringer of fiery destruction who will eventually turn on anyone who summons her..."

Interestingly, this is not the only time Bradley has presented an extremely negative image of great female power. *STORMQUEEN!* (1979) centers around the problems caused by Dorilys, a willful twelve-year-old-girl whose electrical/lightning-generating psychic powers become more dangerous the more she uses them. When Dorilys takes the risky step of exerting her lightning powers to their fullest extent for several hours in order to repel an army of attackers besieging her father's otherwise defenseless castle—a situation in which her only other option is to simply give up and throw herself and everyone else in the castle on the dubious mercy of the enemy—she pays for it by losing both her sanity and what little control she had over her powers, thus becoming an uncontrollable menace to herself and everyone around her. Her mind partially destroyed by this excessive use of her powers, Dorilys strikes her own beloved brother with lightning in a fit of rage, killing him, then finally sinks into a coma. When her friends attempt to probe her mind telepathically to discover if the damage can be undone, the surviving rational part of Dorilys' personality (which had been submerged because of the brain damage while she was still unconscious) warns them that the situation is hopeless and she must never be awakened—a conclusion reminiscent of Jean Grey's desperately turning to suicide as the only possible way of escaping the role of chaos-bringing juggernaut which inevitably befalls anyone acquiring the power of Phoenix.

By portraying Jean (Phoenix) Grey as suffering from the same self-doubt and psychological turmoil that afflicts so many "young women of extraordinary beauty, strength, courage, passion" (*X-MEN #135*, p. 1) in real life, New X-Men scripter Chris Claremont and artist/co-plotter John Byrne made it all too easy for susceptible female fans to identify with the character's familiar-seeming, but apparently groundless (in an experienced super-heroine who had never shown any previous signs of unprincipled powerlust) fears about becoming warped and abnormal as a result of her great abilities. However, instead of symbolically exorcising these fears by having Jean realize their absurdity, or even by having her conquer them through overcoming the darker, ignoble side of herself, as one would expect any well-established, upstanding super-heroine to do, Claremont and Byrne allowed Jean to succumb to her most brutally anti-social impulses so thoroughly that they were finally forced to condemn her to death for her crimes.

This less than satisfactory outcome abruptly turned the harrowing but potentially hopeful story Claremont and Byrne seemed to have been setting the readers up for into a truncated and inadequately prepared-for tragedy. Worse, the last-minute revelation that the Phoenix was not the darker side of Jean's own personality, as had been insisted upon on numerous occasions over the previous four years, but an entirely separate entity whose actions no human host could ultimately hope to control, rendered all the earlier issues' gut-wrenching psychodrama and internal conflict virtually irrelevant, casting them in the light of mere soap-operatic cheap thrills utterly meaningless to the resolution of the problems the story was now belatedly revealed to have been dealing with.

The ultimate irony of the whole super-heroine-as-chaos-bringer trend is that precisely because most women are so fearful about the possible consequences of exercising power, they would be much more likely to cause disasters by shrinking from the opportunity to act or exercise responsibility at a crucial moment than to run amok through yielding to the temptation to seek more and more power and becoming intoxicated by it, as so many recent super-heroines have done. In an October 19, 1980 *NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE* article on "The New Wave of Women Politicians," a female county official from Iowa was quoted as saying, "Power scares women more than it goes to their heads. Nothing taught us we would ever have it." With comic-book stories like the *"Dark Phoenix"* saga and the other Marvel tales of female chaos-bringers to reinforce susceptible female readers' own worst fears about what may happen if they ever do get access to power of any kind, that situation seems unlikely to change any time soon. ●

THE LOST COMICS COMPANIES

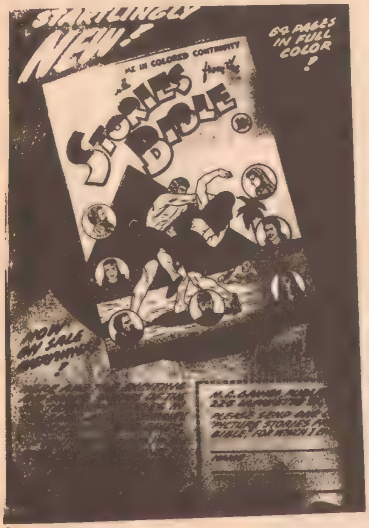
A developmental history of *EC COMICS*

by Chuck Wooley

The first modern comic book, *FUNNIES ON PARADE*, was published in 1933 by the founder of EC Comics. Although not generally considered to be an EC (*FUNNIES ON PARADE* listed no publisher), this and numerous other comics were edited and/or published by EC's creator, Max C. Gaines, prior to 1945.

There is, however, unfortunately little that is known about Gaines' relationship to comics between the years 1933 and 1939, probably because he had little to do with the field. He is of course widely credited with arranging for Superman's debut in *ACTION COMICS #1* (June 1938), but aside from this he seems to have put most of his comics-related energy into the more established newspaper syndicate field.

His hiatus from the comic book field had concluded by 1939, though, and Gaines was permanently back in the industry that he had created. He was listed as *ALL-AMERICAN COMICS*' "Managing Editor" by the ninth issue (December 1939), and for the next few years Gaines was primarily responsible for such DC staples as *ALL-AMERICAN COMICS* (with Green Lantern, the Atom, and Dr. Mid-Nite), *FLASH COMICS* (with Flash and the Hawkman), *SENSATION COMICS* (with Wonder Woman and Wildcat), *COMIC CAVALCADE* (with Flash, Green Lantern, and Wonder Woman), *MUTT AND JEFF*, and the renowned *ALL STAR COMICS*. Gaines' management of these titles lasted through 1943, and terminated somewhere in 1944 or 1945.



PICTURE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE was advertised in the interiors of various National/DC comics, although it could be regarded as the first EC publication.

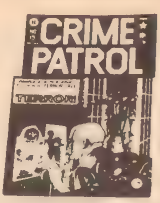
©1982 National Periodical Publications/EC Comics Inc.

Now some people would have been satisfied with creating a publishing field and then controlling a large part of its immortal characters. But not Max C. Gaines! In fact, during 1942, Gaines made the momentous decision to commission the pictorial production of "the entire *Old Testament* told chronologically for the first time, in full color continuity!" In the space of a decade, then, Gaines had not only created a new publishing format, he was using that format to retell the most important literary work of western civilization.

Gaines' adaptation was slated to run 232 pages, which made it four times the number of pages of a normal comic, and the longest continuous comics narrative ever published in America. Because of this, Max decided to initially issue his version of the bible in four sixty-four page parts. Known as *PICTURE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE*, the first issue was advertised in the interiors of the November 1942 National/DC comics that Gaines controlled. (See *FLASH COMICS #35* for sample ad.)

At left, the famous EC symbol appears for what probably was the first time.

At right, *CRIME PATROL*, one of the first EC Comics which resembled the more famous ECs to come.



©1982 William M. Gaines

Magnificent full-page advertisements for this adaptation appeared on the back covers of Gaines' comics the following month (see *FLASH COMICS #36* or *ALL-AMERICAN COMICS #45*). Touted as being "On Sale Everywhere," the comic was also offered for sale directly from the publisher at a cost of 10¢—a very unusual WWII comic book marketing maneuver.

This publishing event takes on added significance because it was to lead directly into the development of EC. For even though the covers of all four parts of the Old Testament were clearly marked "A DC Publication" throughout 1943, Gaines obviously wanted control of his new concept. In a move apparently aimed at furthering this end, the 1944 *COMPLETE LIFE OF CHRIST EDITION OF PICTURE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE* was published without listing a publisher (although Gaines did list himself as editor and copyright holder). The transition from DC to EC was completed by 1946 as the Complete New Testament Edition Picture Stories from the Bible was officially issued by Educational Comics, Inc.

The earliest use of the name EC apparently first occurred in 1945, however, in a series that was derived from *PICTURE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE*. This new series was entitled *PICTURE STORIES FROM AMERICAN HISTORY*, and the cover of the first part may well feature the first use, anywhere, of the familiar EC symbol. Gaines was clearly separated from National/DC at this time, at least in spirit and perhaps also in law.

Along with his new company name Gaines had more big plans. *PICTURE STORIES FROM AMERICAN HISTORY* listed a number of comics "in preparation," including comics which were subsequently issued (such as *PICTURE STORIES FROM SCIENCE*), as well as some that were never issued (such as *PICTURE STORIES FROM MYTHOLOGY* and *PICTURE STORIES FROM SHAKESPEARE*).

By 1946 *PICTURE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE* had sold 900,000 copies, and Gaines' New Testament adaptations had sold over 2,500,000 copies. By 1947 Max was also issuing *PICTURE STORIES FROM WORLD HISTORY* and *PICTURE STORIES FROM SCIENCE* under the EC "Educational Comics" banner. Interestingly, by 1947 Gaines was also publishing *ANIMAL FABLES*, *TINY TOT COMICS*, *DANDY COMICS*, *LAND OF THE LOST COMICS*, *ANIMATED COMICS*, and *FAT AND SLAT*, most of which were directly aimed at very young readers. Curiously, these were also published under the EC banner, but for these latter titles the symbol EC stood for Entertaining, and not for Educational, Comics.

Max was also publishing one other type of comic in 1947. Called *INTERNATIONAL COMICS*, this publication was the first adventure/action/crime type comic that Gaines presented. As such, it represents the beginnings of the type of EC comic that most fans associate with the name.

Between 1933 and 1947, then, Max Gaines created the modern comic book package; got Superman into comics; was "Managing Editor" of about half of National/DC's super-hero line during their WWII height; sold millions of copies of "*Picture Story*" adaptations of the Bible and American History; founded EC comics; developed EC's line of "kiddie" comics; and set the foundation for the great horror and science fiction ECs of 1949-1955. And, then, tragically, the creator of the modern comic book died in a boating accident on Lake Placid, New York.

At this point Max's son, William, took over his father's business. For whatever reason, Bill soon changed the direction of his father's company, gradually cancelling the kiddie comics and replacing them with westerns and with reality-based comics set in contemporary society.

Thus, 1948 saw the premieres of *SADDLE JUSTICE*, *WAR AGAINST CRIME*, *CRIME PATROL*, and *GUNFIGHTER*, while *MODERN LOVE* debuted in early 1949. The strangest title Bill Gaines issued during this time was doubtlessly *MOON GIRL*, which ran the gamut of possible themes from super-hero to love to crime. And perhaps the most desirable of these is *MOON GIRL FIGHTS CRIME #8*, which contains the classic "*Smashing the Dope Ring!*"

EC unquestionably entered into its finest phase in early 1950, however, when *CRYPT OF TERROR*, *HAUNT OF FEAR*, *VAULT OF HORROR*, *WEIRD FANTASY* and *WEIRD SCIENCE* all premiered. By the end of 1950 *CRIME SUSPENSTORIES* and *TWO-FISTED TAKES* had also appeared.

These sf, horror, and war stories breathed vitality into the somewhat jaded comics marketplace. Bill Gaines accomplished this by hiring and inspiring some of the most talented individuals to ever work in comics, including Al Feldstein, Wally Wood, Jack Davis, Joe Orlando, Harvey Kurtzman, Al Williamson, and Frank Frazetta. It should be noted that Gaines' inspiration was such that most of these talented artists did the best work of their careers under his guidance.

The times were not without their problems, however. Anti-comics crusaders, led by the late Fredric Wertham, had been assaulting comics since the early days of WWII. Their tirades became so vocal that Congressional hearings were held about 1954, the final result of which was the Comics Code Authortiy.

The CCA was the most stringent self-censoring agency ever to control an American medium, and it, along with television and bad publicity, almost killed the entire comics industry.

By late 1954, the CCA had outlawed such EC staples as sex, death, blood, divorce, and horror (even including vampires and other traditional folkloric motifs). Emasculated but game, Gaines & crew tried to comply with the CCA's new directives, and during 1954-1955 they issued *ACES HIGH*, *EXTRA*, *IMPACT*, *INCREDIBLE SCIENCE FICTION*, *MD*, *PIRACY*, *PSYCHOANALYSIS*, and *VALOR*. They even experimented in the black and white magazine format, issuing *SHOCK, CRIME, and TERROR ILLUSTRATED* in magazine format.

But by mid-1956 the only surviving EC title was *MAD*, which had itself been transformed from a full color comic to a black-and-white magazine.

Since then, Bill Gaines' "What, Me Worry?" attitude has been having the last laugh on us all. Spa Fon!●

AN OVERVIEW OF JOHN BYRNE'S FANTASTIC FOURS

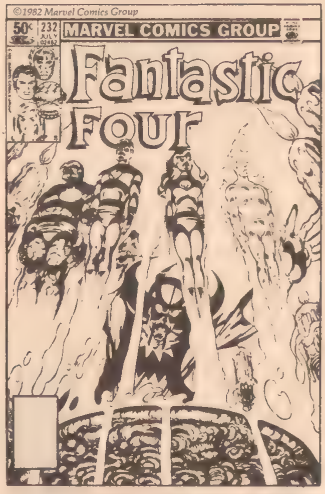
BYRNE'S BASICS

by Dennis Perado

When it was announced that John Byrne was leaving his position as artist and co-plotter for the *"New X-Men"* series, it was big news. Byrne, after all, was at least one-half of a creative team which had elevated that series to fan-favoritism—and massive direct sales figures. While the extent of Byrne's contribution to the *X-MEN*'s book's teamwork might never be fully acknowledged, it was very apparent that his co-plotting and plot presentation significantly enhanced the reader reception of the material he was given to work with. Some fans wondered that, if Byrne was the major force, as some reports indicated, behind *X-MEN*'s star status, if he was primarily responsible for the pacing and the presentation of the plots and characters, then why would he need a dialoguer as a collaborator? Certainly he could go the distance and do it all himself?

Whether through that process or not, John Byrne arrived at the same decision, and announced that he requested and had been given editiorial permission to become writer/artist on Marvel's flagship *FANTASTIC FOUR* title. The question then became: Could Byrne deliver the same tight, suspenseful story-telling and clear design work on a project which he was producing from scratch? Certainly his previous work scripting *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* and a *HULK ANNUAL* had been quite capable and satisfactory, and his previous excursion as a series artist/writer (on Charlton's *DOOMSDAY PLUS ONE*) was acceptable even then, before Byrne became both much more polished and popular enough to be considered a super-star of present-day comics. Could there be any doubt about his success?

Well, yes, there could be. After all, *DOOMSDAY PLUS ONE* was a long time past, and regularly writing and drawing one's own work—and developing the series—is a very different, much more demanding task than plotting for (and dialoguing over) Sal Buscema layouts. The *MT-I-O* was promising, the *X-MEN* work was promising. But then, there appeared to be some serious drawbacks to Byrne's announced plans for the World's Greatest Comics Magazine...

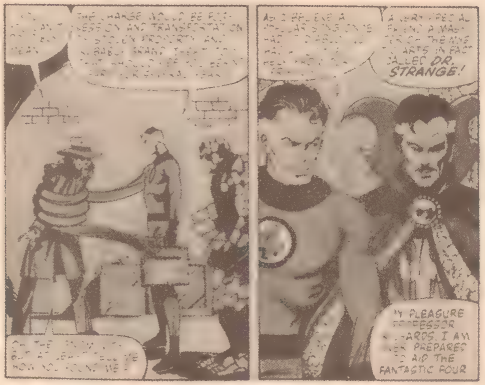


Byrne's initial solo *FANTASTIC FOUR* took the series *"Back to the Basics."*

First, the undercurrent of quasi-realistic violence in Byrne's *X-MEN* work posed a threat to the fabulous foursome amost immediately. In an effort to get some excitement into the *"Fantastic Four"* series (or at least in reporting about the *"Fantastic Four"* series), Byrne announced that he had intentions of killing off Franklin Richards (the son of Reed and Sue Richards), Alicia Masters (long-time girlfriend of the Thing) was to be nearly fatally battered while in the vicinity of an F.F. rumble, and the Thing would give her up forever for her own good, the Silver Surfer's home planet would be destroyed, horrible events lay in store for the Torch's former girlfriend Crystal and her unborn child. Things looked bleak for a title whose appeal lay in the Middle-American normalcy of its protagonists. Perhaps the F.F. (both the characters and the series) had become complacent, but was such sweeping tragedy really necessary to get the fans to take the *"Fantastic Four"* series seriously again? Certainly, the characters' clashes with death, tragedy, and lasting unhappiness was part of what made *X-MEN* under Byrne so unpredictable and successful (and at times, the streamlining and dynamism of Byrne's art seemed to be the sole reason that the entire production did not degenerate into bathos), but would the fan audience accept such tactics on a series which, early on, had popularized its cast on the basis of their stability and their almost 1950s-ish reliance on the sanctity of the family? Did the readership-at-large really want a Fantastic Four who had *"New X-Men"* adventures?

Also, to add to the confusion, Byrne also mentioned that he wanted to bring the F.F. back to the feel of the early (#1-40) issues, with their tormented, lonely Thing, their heavy emphasis on the Human Torch, and the skinny figures in the baggy costumes. How could this mixture of vintage and oh-so-trendy elements be successfully assimilated into 1981's *FANTASTIC FOUR* title, even by an industry super-star like Byrne? Elated, worried, or whatever, everyone was interested.

Byrne's first solo issue *(FANTASTIC FOUR #232)* featured the evil alchemist Diablo in the ironically-titled *"Back to the Basics."* The story was a capably-handled Lee/Kirby-derived vehicle for showcasing the F.F.'s separate personalities and abilities, in which Sue,



In *F.F. #232*, the presence of Doctor Strange "...undermined the F.F.'s own capabilites..."

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Ben, Reed, and Johnny are each attacked by creatures composed of each of the four "basic" elements; earth, air, fire, and water. Their individual fights display the team's individual capabilities—following which, they defeat the elementals in the best *"F.F."* tradition: through Reed's brain and teamwork. It was a good beginning.

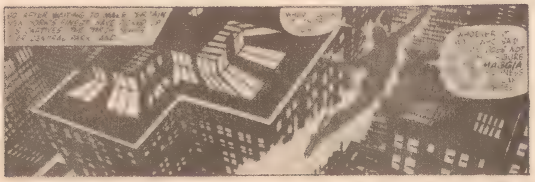
Not that there weren't some problems. Byrne had decided to direct the Torch's love life back towards Roy Thomas' Frankie Raye character (who had been more or less gone from the series since Thomas himself departed), so there was some clumsy (though necessary) expository dialogue in that scene which did no credit to either character. Also, Reed's enlistment of Doctor Strange to search out Diablo was quite logical—as well as being a welcome nostalgic nod to the old days when any Marvel character could show up in any other series—but the "need" for Strange's presence undermined the F.F.'s own capabilities, and ruptured the story's dramatic structure.

There was also the matter of Byrne's artwork—now also a one-man show, since long-time *"F.F."* inker Joe Sinnott had departed the issue before. It was obvious that Byrne's long hiatus from inking had eroded his embellishing abilities' progress, and his long association with the ultra-slick Terry Austin was making his solo work look, by comparison, much less expert than it was. The inking on *F.F. #232* was capable overall, although somewhat muddy-looking. The greatest casualty seemed to be the characters' street clothes, although other textures sometimes suffered also (see Frankie's hair on page 7, panel 5 for instance). Reed, Sue, and Johnny, each lost about 20% of their previous body weights (back to the old) and Sue got a new, 1981-*chic* hair-do (in with the new). The skinny characters, the muddy inking, the relatively simple plot—all were highly reminiscent of the first two years of the *F.F.* comic. *"Back to the Basics"* indeed.

FANTASTIC FOUR #233, *"Mission for a Dead Man,"* featured the Torch in a quest to clear the name of an old childhood enemy of his (who died a convicted murderer). It was, again, a very capable, enjoyable issue, and the emphasis on the Torch was long overdue. The story returned such hoary old *"F.F."* routines as the Thing/Torch feuds, Ben's bitterness at being the Thing, one member of the F.F. (in this case, the Invisible Girl) explaining the wonders of the F.F.'s automatic-screening elevator to some astonished guest.

Byrne's plotting was developing to the point at which, unlike some of his earlier collaborative work with Claremont or Wolfman, it was necessary to *read* each panel. Since *F.F. #233*'s plot was a modified detective story, suspicious statements, actions, and clues become necessary to the reader's understanding of the plot—and have to be introduced in such a manner so that the reader couldn't possibly miss them (detective stories and super-antics being generally incompatible—Bruce Wayne and kin notwithstanding). If anything, *"Mission for a Dead Man"* had too *much* plot in it. The issue's super-menace (Hammerhead) was introduced on page 16 (of 22), and despite Byrne's best efforts, the lead-in action sequences (the Thing/Torch squabble, the Torch tracking down an informant, the Torch overcoming three thugs at a warehouse), seemed anachronistically tepid. Clearly, the *"1960s F.F."* format needed more alterations and compromises to fit the faster pace of a 1980s comic book.

And there still remained problems with Byrne's inking, also. His Thing looked too obviously two-dimensional (the price of no Sinnott?), and the Torch in flame looked too clearly to be a collection of pen lines with oddly-placed black blobs for muscle definition. More work was needed on them, too. On the "plus" side, however, Byrne's darker, less slick inking created a seedier mood for the interludes held on the poor side of town (unlike the so-slick-it-shines slum in *X-MEN #122*), and his shots of the Torch flying above a NYC composed of perspective-correct windows against a



Byrne's nighttime scenes of the Torch in flight create a "...sense of wonder about flight..."

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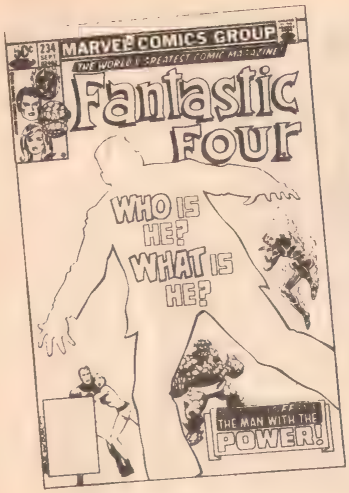

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black background create more of a sense of wonder about flight than anything since *SUPERMAN I*.

Byrne's next efforts, *"The Man with the Power,"* and *"Four Against Ego," (F.F. #234, 5)* are technically a two-parter, although they seem to be held together via the slenderest of threads. The former issue involves a "typical" Middle-class American workman who, unbeknownst to everyone—including himself—possesses ultimate power, and can make anything happen just by wishing it would. Byrne introduces this character ("Skip" Collins) and his attributes in a series of restrained, rather amusing tableaux of his daily interactions with his family, employer, and environment. Collins is presented as a basically decent fellow, but so unremarkable that the reader cannot help but feel some small contempt for any man who would settle for an existence of such relentless tedium.

The story builds well, however, including sequences of "Skip" Collins unwittingly causing disasters in New York, thus fulfilling his wish to "see the F.F. in action." It was nice to see "Skip's" hero-worship of Marvel's premiere super-hero team, as it reinforces the usually-unstated vision of the F.F. as Marvel-Earth's benevolent big brother/celebrities—somewhere between the militia and Liz and Dick. (Byrne indulged himself in an in-joke during the story, as the guidebook which "Skip" is using attributes the building of the Baxter Building (the F.F.'s headquarters) to one Jackson Leigh Baxter, in 1961—a tribute to the F.F.'s own "architects," Jack(son?) Kirby, and Stan Lee (sic), and *their* masterful building of a grand design, which also began in 1961.) If this story—taken on its own terms as a kind of *F.F./"Spirit"* pot-luck melange—has any real shortcomings, it's the means by which it connects to its sequel, *"Four Against Ego."* Attempting to ascertain the source of the destructive force which is wreaking havoc all over the world, Reed Richards runs some tests through his computer set-up. The computer analyzes the information and concludes that it's an attack from outer space. The F.F. rocket out to outer space and encounter Ego, the Living Planet (from *THOR #133*). My problem with that situation is: was Ego really the force which caused the destruction all over the world? (I had thought that "Skip's" mysterious "power" had done that.) Was Ego approaching Earth with murder in his continent-sized eye because "the power" wanted to set up a situation in which the F.F. is challenged on a cosmic scale—or was it pure coincidence that Reed's computer should err and send the F.F. on a wild-goose chase into outer space *just* at the time at which Ego was approaching on an independent errand (tracking down Galactus, as the Living Planet states in #235)? I've read these issues several times, and this point *still* confuses me. John, can you explain it?

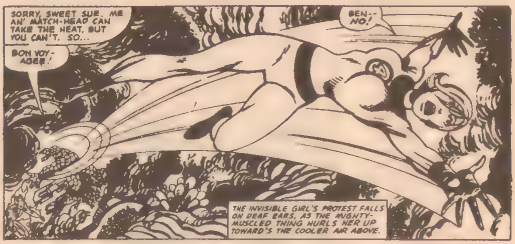
Beyond that, issue #235 was an acceptable attempt to produce a cosmic epic-scale story in the Kirby mold, and was certainly ripe with nostalgia. The Thing's carrying a bomb into a gigantic, threatening life-form is straight out of *FANTASTIC FOUR #4* (and the splash of #235 was deliberately reminiscent of one of the chapter splashed from the earlier issue), and Ego trotted out all of his old tricks from his first two *THOR* appearances (both by Kirby). The story had a good, strong narrative flow, and adequate recreations of the original Kirby reference material, but even for a fan of Kirby's, of those old issues, and of Byrne's work in general (such as myself), I can't quite justify praising Byrne's re-tooling of ideas and spectacular visuals which first appeared over ten years ago. When Kirby himself hews to closely to his past triumphs, he's criticized for his lack of imagination and his adherence to the past, so why should anyone else's fond remembrances of classic Kirby work be lauded?

Well, the easiest answer to that is: because Byrne is bringing the *"F.F."* feature back to its roots, and it's impossible to do that without drawing

heavily on the style and creations of Marvel's original idea man. It's also to Byrne's credit that his work is so *obviously* meant to take the feature back to those early issues—before any real *original* progress begins—that the derivativeness of the art, ideas, and plotting style seems respectful, slightly antiquated, and charming. That's my opinion, anyway—but as a reviewer, I can't recommend this book, with that approach, to everyone. The vast majority of Marvel readers, I would suspect, view the first five years of *FANTASTIC FOUR* as the comics equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls, *and* (more importantly) comics which have *long ago* been surpassed by subsequent issues by Roy Thomas, John Buscema, Rich Buckler, Len Wein, George Perez, Marv Wolfman, Keith Pollard, Doug Moench, Bill Sienkiewicz, etc. Byrne obviously thinks otherwise (and more power to him!! Oops, back to my stolid reviewer persona), but I wonder how many readers he's convincing with his (perhaps) too-repetitive-for-the-oldsters, too-antiquated-for-the-youngsters approach.

Enough speculation. Back to the specifics.

The artwork on *FANTASTIC FOUR #235* continued to show rough spots, even though there were almost no normal-folks-doing-normal-things interludes (Byrne's major weakness) to undermine its overall capability. (The one normal-stuff scene, a one-page interlude with Frankie Raye, was weakened by a panel in which a nude Ms. Raye walks across the room to grab a towel and neither her feet nor her legs show any indication of supporting weight or touching the floor—and her hair is still an unruly mess of black splotches). Byrne continued to have problems with spot blacks on the Thing (and even direct Kirby-swipes like the one on page 6, panel 4 did not overcome this particular failing). His Torch improved considerably due to the deletion of the heavy black lines of muscle definition, and Reed was fine throughout. I could crab about Byrne's Sue, however, since she appears (facially) to be little better than a homely boy. Despite Byrne's generally fine work on this character's personality (a nice, subtle transition to fully-active, equal member of the team), I wish he could recapture some of Sue's subtle, seemingly effortless femininity of movement and attitude that she showed during her Kirby years. Does anyone else out there remember when Sue Storm was one of the most glamorous female characters in comics? (It's true that her dialogue was more often than not Twit City, but Byrne's already got *that* tendency well under control—he just has to work on her looks.)


SORRY, SWEET SUE. ME AN' MATCH-HEAD CAN TAKE THE HEAT, BUT YOU CAN'T. SO..
BON VOY-AGE!
BEN!- NO!
THE INVISIBLE GIRL'S PROTEST FALLS ON DEAF EARS, AS THE MIGHTY MUSCLED THING HURLS HER UP TOWARD'S THE COOLER AIR ABOVE.
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Byrne's Sue Storm Richards is "...(facially) little better than a homely boy."

Byrne's next effort, the twentieth anniversary issue of *FANTASTIC FOUR (#236, "Terror in a Tiny Town")*, crystallized his new/old approach to the feature, was a fitting tribute to the creators who and the series which began the Marvel Comics phenomenon, and was a gripping, suspenseful, fully *complete* story in its own right. The story worked very nicely on two levels: both as an *"F.F."* adventure in which the fabulous foursome's minds are transferred to miniature, non-powered replica bodies of themselves and imprisoned in an artificially-maintained small-town model; and as a salute to the F.F.'s earliest adventures, in which human interest shared equal billing with inventive plots, the F.F. operated in plain clothes, and (whoopee!!) a return to the days in which Doctor Doom was truly a master *planner*, as well as a multi-faceted super-menace. I can't say enough nice things about this issue. It's the best Marvel comic of their 20th anniversary year, and probably the best single *"F.F."* story since the wrap-up of the *"Dr. Doom/Prisoner"* series back in 1969.

The story was replete with little touches which charmed the long-time reader, like Sue's 1961 hair-do, Johnny's stripped-down hot rods, Ben's metamorphosis through six different appearances (each of which he had—under different *"F.F."*-inkers—and chronologically accurate), the Kirby-esque shots of Vincent "Vaughn" Doom (from *F.F. ANNUAL #2)*, even Doom's long-dormant predilection for "mini-aturizing" the foursome (from #10 and

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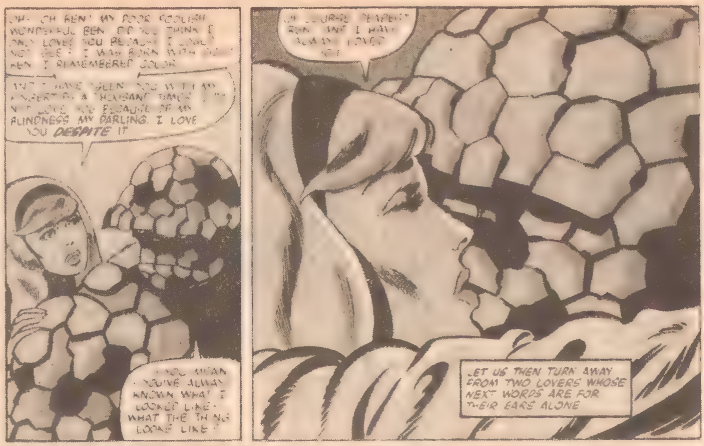
FANTASTIC FOUR #236 **marked "a return to the days in which Doctor Doom was truly a master *planner*."**

The love scene between the Thing and Alicia was "...worth the magazine's price twice over all by itself..."


OH, BEN! MY POOR FOOLISH WONDERFUL BEN! DO YOU THINK I ONLY LOVE YOU BECAUSE I WON'T SEE? I WAS BORN WITH BLIND BEN I REMEMBERED COLOR
NO! I HAVE FALLEN SO WELL AND TRULY IN LOVE WITH A HUMAN BEING THAT MY LOVE IS EQUAL OF AN BLINDNESS MY DARLING I LOVE YOU DESPITE IT
YOU MEAN YOU'VE ALWAYS KNOWN WHAT I LOOK LIKE WHAT THE THING LOOKS LIKE?
OF COURSE, FEATHER-BRAIN! NOW, WE I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED
LET US THEN TURN AWAY FROM TWO LOVERS WHOSE NEXT WORDS ARE FOR THEIR EARS ALONE

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#16, remember?). The love scene between the Thing and Alicia (who has her sight in Liddleville—and is Ben Grimm's wife there) is worth the magazine's price twice over all by itself, and the appearance of the (*still*-reformed) Puppet Master added significantly both to the plot and to the human interest. (Along those same lines, the absence of Sue and Johnny's father might have tipped the F.F. off to the fact that they were living in an F.F.-less dream world, inasmuch as Dr. Storm was killed—by Skrulls—as a direct consequence of the super-powered quartet's opposing the race of shape-changers in *F.F. #2*. Doom and the Puppet Master probably *weren't* interested in *strict* representation of a world in which the F.F. had never existed, but still, such an omission might've indicated an outside manipulation to someone [besides me].) Even Byrne's still-muddy inking worked on this nightmarish what-if tale, darkening its tone and creating a *consistent* atmosphere of shadowy menace.

One problem I did have with *F.F. #236*, though—and with Marvel Comics in general—is the occurrence of misspelled words. *F.F. #236* had three by my count: "weasle," "medievel," and "frought." This is really irritating to me, since I learned to spell from reading books and magazines in which words were spelled correctly, and I see today's child-readers of comics being denied that same advantage. Is the problem insufficient time for copy-editing, or can't the copy-editors spell? (And so help me, if I see "free reign" one more time...)

The less said about *F.F. #236*'s back feature (a collection of Kirby animation storyboards, dialogued by Stan Lee and inked by almost every *"F.F."*-inker that could be found), the better. Marvel would've been better off to reprint something. The only contributor who comes off even moderately well in this slipshod "special feature" is Kirby, who was not informed of Marvel's plans for his storyboard roughs and strongly protested the use of his work for a purpose for which it was not designed. This effort at representing Kirby's art work in such a back-door manner is rudeness bordering on unprofessionalism—and the finished product definitely did *not* justify the means.

Back to Byrne. *F.F. #237*, *"The Eyes Have It,"* was a one-issue story involving Reed and Sue's brush with some aliens. The main plot (alien "befriended" by men with criminal intent) was so old that it creaked, but the issue was saved due to several nice aspects of the presentation, including: intelligent incarceration of Doctor Doom, interludes with the Torch and the Thing which demonstrated their powers and furthered their individual sub-plots (making up for the fact that they saw no real "action" this issue); and by my accounting, this being the *first* story *ever* spotlighting Mr. Fantastic and the Invisible Girl. Naturally, Reed's intellect was featured, as he had to be the character who actually solved the puzzle which lay under the plot, but Sue's battle skills were also firmly in the issue's forefront—and her maneuver as regards the "opaque-" ness of her force field to the alien Spinerette was darned clever. A nice, but minor issue.

One problem with Byrne's character presentation which only appears from time to time (but is quite annoying when it does) is his clumsiness with expository dialogue. For example, when the F.F., Franklin, and Alicia are on their way to dispose of Doctor Doom before the next issue can really get rolling, Alicia asks Sue (who is guiding her) to please slow down. Sue rather baldfacedly replies, "Oops! Sorry, Alicia! I keep forgetting that your're *blind!*" Now, I'll admit that the days when handicaps are tactfully ignored and the handicapped are locked in closets are behind us, but I really think that Sue could be more gracious about it, and Byrne could be less transparent also. As long as he's retrenching the good old days, how about going back to the days in which Alicia would be introduced into the story and a friendly asterisk would lead the newer reader to the bottom of the panel, where rested a yellow box reading, "Alicia is the Thing's girlfriend. She is blind and the step-daughter of the Puppet Master." How much more tactful can you get, right?

Byrne repeats the same mistake in issue #239, in a scene in which Ben, testing his strength with a hydraulic press, reminds Alicia that she can't see him do so because she's blind. Now I'm as big a booster of having individual issues of comics be as autonomous of each other as possible, but there have to be some limits on what the characters are expected to say to each other. Fortunately, this problem is minor and doesn't appear frequently.

F.F. #238 is immediately distinguishable in that it was the first *F.F.* in many years to feature two stories (since #118, I think). It also featured the strangest cover on an *F.F.* issue in at *least* as many years. On it, a rather idealized-looking John Byrne proclaims (via placard) the magazine's contents, while a very large Dr. Doom figure sports another placard which reads, "Honest! Doctor Doom is not in this Marvel Comic!" The F.F., properly horrified, look on in dismay. What was behind this particular deviation from "wham-bam-pow! I'll *kill* you *dead dead DEAD!* Not if I *kill* you *DEADER FIRST!*" covers (which seem to be the accepted standard form at both Marvel and DC these years), I don't know. Perhaps Byrne was protesting the appearances of Dr. Doom in three different Marvel series mere months before the *F.F.* anniversary issue (as well he might—all but the tepid *"Iron Man"* adventure were real stinkers). Perhaps he just wanted to run an off-beat cover—thus also keeping in tune with the old Lee/Kirby years in which the *F.F.* comic was respected for its constant experimentation and surprises (and humor). Maybe he just felt like being funny. Whatever reason, I approve.

Inside the book, the long-awaited solution of the mystery of Frankie Raye appeared: she was revealed to be the adopted daughter of Professor Horton (creator of the first, android Human Torch). She had gained flaming powers in an accident, and Prof. Horton had placed hypnotic restraints (including a fear of fire) on her, so she would not remember ever having possessed such powers. There was also some gobbledegook about a gold lame costume she wore, which is visible when she's undressed, but when she *is* dressed —however skimpily—it's invisible. I don't understand it at all. She must have seen it whenever she took a shower, changed clothes, made love, etc. Well, maybe it makes sense, but not to me...

Anyway, the scenes of Frankie's explaining the whole mess to Johnny are very well-staged and expressive (but you know, I think I see the Gwen Stacy-cheekbone dead giveaway of a John Romtia re-touching in several panels, including panel one on page two and panel one on page three). Frankie eventually remembers all, flames on, and she and Johnny fly around the city. A few nice touches include: Johnny's explaining various common-sense facts about flying to Frankie (shows he learned something!), Reed testing Sue's powers (and Sue explaining them to the —hypothetical—new reader), and Byrne's very original—however ugly—design for a fire-woman. A few not-so-nice touches include Reed's assuming that Frankie would *want* to become a member of the F.F without even asking her, the absence of either "continued next issue" or "the end" from the ending of the first story, ensuring that the readers received an unsettling jolt when they turned the page and found a pin-up of Sue, and Frankie's looks (in flame), which are U-G-L-Y.

(The pin-up of Sue, by the way, is okay—except Sue looks like she's floating in mid-air.)

As a background note, I had understood that Roy Thomas introduced Frankie into the series intending for her to become a fire-woman, but as the natural daughter of Toro, the Human Torch's kid assistant in WW II. I suppose it's six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, but I can't understand why Byrne would find it necessary to change the original plan. (Some of my information indicates that he was very much opposed to Frankie being Toro's daughter.) Are there advantages to Frankie being the step-daughter of Horton? John, are you listening?

The back-up feature in *F.F. #238, "The More Things Change..."* was, I suspect, designed to keep the readers off-guard. "Oh yeah? [Byrne seems to be saying] You think I'm all done with my back-to-1962 tactics? You think I'm gonna let the F.F. coast now that I've got my footing? You think I don't know that some changes keep everybody interested whether they *like* the changes or not? Well, you're wrong!" This adventure introduced a new mechanical baby-sitter for Franklin Richards, and changed the Thing's appearance back to what it was *circa F.F. #3*—permanently (it says here)! We'll see...

The story was very dramatic, and Byrne has more of a command over the old/newest version of the Thing than he did over the previous one, so I can't complain. I *do* wish I know how Marvel let him get away with changing the appearance of one of its most widely-marketed characters, but maybe the *F.F. was* in as much of a sales slump as some reports indicated it to be (pre-Byrne, that is), and they're letting Byrne have free rein. Anyway, the Thing's transformation solved one consistent problem with Byrne's artwork, and seemingly got Ben Grimm to accept *once and for all* that he's not going to change back to his human form. It was an

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One of the good points of Byrne's later issues of *FANTASTIC FOUR* was his "very original—however ugly—design for a fire-woman."

eventful issue, and lots of fun to read.

"Wendy's Friends," issue #239, was slightly less fun to read, if only that I can't accept the fact that those cute little beasties (to which the title refers) from the excavation around Benson, Arizona, could scare at least nine people to death. True, there was some mention of the creatures forcing people to confront the dark sides of their own souls, but when the creatures approached the F.F., our heroes registered only comparitively slight surprise. Were the F.F. judged, too—and accepted as totally worthy? Shouldn't they at least have acknowledged that such a process had happened to them, too? It just doesn't hang together for me, John. I also enjoyed the introduction of Ben's Aunt Petunia, including the surprising revelation that she was so young, and that Ben's Uncle Jake is still alive. I can't think of any good reason why the Thing never visited such nice people as Petunia and Jake long before this, but I'm willing to let that slide as long as they're a) not forgotten again, and b) not made the focus for some upcoming tragedy. Nice people—and characters—should be seen and enjoyed. This issue's guest appearance by Margaret Rutherford is also entertaining (but "Most Unexpected Guest-Star of All Time"?! Uh-uh).

I enjoyed many aspects of this issue, including Frankie's instruction (by Reed) concerning the relationship between great power and great responsibility—a theme which can't be made clear enough in comics. I only wish I'd thought more of the plot of *FANTASTIC FOUR #239.*

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"...I can't accept the fact that those cute little beasties (to which the title [*"Wendy's Friends"*] refers) from the excavation around Benson, Arizona, could scare at least nine people to death." In this scene from *FANTASTIC FOUR #239*, the beasties confront Byrne's new/old Thing.

So what about John Byrne's approach to the *FANTASTIC FOUR?* Here's some of the questions this article poses—and their answers:

1) Is the new/old approach working?

Well, not seamlessly, but it's easily the best "return to past glories" effort I've seen lately. I can forgive any amount of anachronistic "remember when"-ing as long as the creator devotes some thought to the *reasons* behind why the "old stuff was better," and doesn't just regurgitate its surface attributes. Byrne gives his new/old *F.F.* a lot of thought.

2) What about the violent stuff that was promised?

Hasn't happened yet. From the looks of the happy Fantastic Family, Byrne's changed his mind. Good.

Is Byrne's F.F. work better than his X-Men work?

I think so. There's a lot more effort towards tighter stories and character presentation (as opposed to melodrama). Hey, I hated the *"New X-Men"* and I still do. Can I be excused from this question?

4) Is Byrne's F.F. worth buying?

They're solid and entertaining. They're well-crafted. They're even exciting in a very pleasant way. *I* buy 'em—and I don't see any reason why any reader of comics here in the 1980s shouldn't do the same.●

Next Issue:

The Second Annual
COMICS FEATURE

YEAR IN REVIEW

featuring our round-up reviews of a year's worth of issues of todays top comics, including:
FANTASTIC FOUR, X-MEN, TEEN TITANS, AVENGERS, DAREDEVIL. JONAH HEX, the **MARVEL/DC TABLOIDS,** *and many more, by our all-star cast of reviewers, including* **Peter Sanderson, Kurt Busiek, Bob Soron, Chuck Huber, Doug Highsmith, Dennis Perado,** *and* **Margaret O'Connell**

An interview with
DICK TRACY (and Ms. Tree)'s
Max Allan Collins
conducted by
Peter Sanderson

Also featuring:
Murray Ward's
"Super-Team Spirit"
returns with the
Teen Titans, Doom Patrol, and **Metal Men**

An interview with
Kurt Schaffenberger
conducted by
Richard Howell

Plus: **The Lost Comics Groups, News, End Notes, the Fandom Zone,** *and plenty of surprises!*

WORLD'S FINEST

MEDIOCRITY

A comprehensive overview of DC's multi-feature Dollar Comic by Bryan Uhlenbrock

The very title, *"WORLD'S FINEST COMICS,"* has always impressed me as being a highly arrogant statement. It may have been true enough in the early 1940s, when super-heroes were revolutionizing the comics form; when the only *real* comic books were *American* comic books, and DC was the undisputed leader of the field. Today, however, with the European album format clearly outshining anything the American publishers can put on the stands—and with DC's claims to supremacy in its own league being challenged by the upstarts over at Marvel—we can only dismiss the title in question as wishful thinking.

Nonetheless, if the "Miss Universe" pageant can retain its name without so much as a single extraterrestrial contestant. . . if The Clash can hype themselves as "the only rock-and-roll band that matters" without a whimper of protest from the legions of rock journalists, and the television networks can claim that every new show to make its way through the studio meat-grinder is a "new hit series" no matter *how* badly it may be doing in the Nielsen ratings. . . we should be able to accept the title of *"WORLD'S FINEST COMICS"* at face value. The question at hand is this: Does that "face value" equal out to one dollar in cold, hard cash?

One undeniably positive aspect of *WORLD'S FINEST*'s expansion to the Dollar Comic format (which publisher Jenette Kahn introduced in 1977 with mixed results) is the addition of several other series to the book, complementing the long-running Superman/Batman collaborations. Fan-favorites such as *"Green Arrow," "Hawkman,"* and *"Shazam!,"* while unable to make it alone in the marketplace, contribute immeasurably to the book's appeal. It is entirely possible that someone who is bored with the overexposed stars of the book might pick up *WF* just to see Captain Marvel. At any rate, it is certainly (from DC's point of view) justifiable for the World's Finest Team to have to carry dead weight like the Red Tornado, as long as they can keep Captain Marvel in the public eye at the same time.

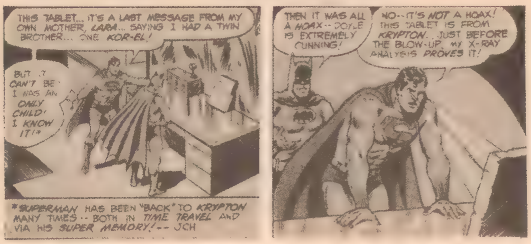
Just how much dead weight *is WORLD'S FINEST* carrying? How well is it making use of the important properties like Superman, Batman and Captain Marvel? How are the lesser characters such as Green Arrow and Hawkman making use of the valuable exposure they are receiving? An in-depth examination of *WORLD'S FINEST COMICS*, from #244 to the present, is clearly in order.

WORLD'S FINEST #244, the first giant-sized issue with a $1 price-tag, sported an eye-catching cover by Neal Adams, an artist who contributes all-too-infrequently to comic books these days. The interior line-up featured the Superman/Batman team (scripted by Bob Haney, illustrated by Jose Luis Garcia Lopez and Murphy Anderson), followed by a Black Canary/Green Arrow non-team-up, since each needed to prove his or her worth as a solo star. (The Canary segment was scripted by Jack C. Harris while Tony Isabella handled the Arrow —artwork throughout was provided by Mike Nasser and Terry Austin.) The Vigilante was also on hand (in a story written by Bill Kunkel and illustrated by John Calnan & Bob Smith), and a Wonder Woman story rounded out the issue (as scripted by Denny O'Neil and depicted by Jose Delbo and Vince Colletta). The Haney script for *"Three Billion Targets"* was mediocre at best (and muddled at worst), enlivened only by Lopez and Anderson's wonderfully detailed artwork. The Black Canary/Green Arrow tales were quite admirable in both story and art, especially the dialogue-free battle scene in a moving automobile depicted on page seven of the Green Arrow segment. Vigilante's solo story was eminently forgettable, and the WWII-

vintage Wonder Woman tale (nearly all of the Amazing Amazon's run in *WORLD'S FINEST* occurred while ABC TV's *WONDER WOMAN* show had inspired DC to present Princess Diana's adventures during World War II) competed with Vigilante for the dubious honor of being the worst story of the issue.

The next issue was a little better: Neal Adams' work again graced the cover; Bob Haney's Superman/Batman offering featured a guest shot by J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter, while Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson were reunited to handle the artistic chores; Gerry Conway provided a touching Green Arrow/Black Canary tale, which Nasser and Austin illustrated quite strikingly; Gray Morrow's atmospheric artwork enlivened Bill Kunkel's mindless Vigilante script, while James Sherman and Bob Wiacek did much the same for Gerry Conway's Wonder Woman tale.

I suppose I should admit the following in the interest of fairness: I seldom appreciate Bob Haney's work. His dialogue is filled with pseudo-hip jargon (or rather, jargon that a forty-year old would think a teenager might find hip) and his plots often display an appalling lack of concern for established lore. With that admission of critical "un-partiality" in mind, the following is a strong statement indeed: The two-part Superman/Batman tale which ran in *WF #246-247* (*"The Prisoner of the Kryptonite Asteroid"* and *"Last Hurrah for a Superman"*) was probably the nadir of Haney's work on the World's Finest team. The Superman we know and love was replaced by his supposed "little brother," a hunchback who claimed that Kal-El had imprisoned him in a kryptonite asteroid long ago. The Man of Steel nearly lost his life freeing his ersatz sibling from the kryptonite, and the "little brother" became a dictatorial "Big Brother" during Kal-El's absence. Not even a guest-appearance by the Justice League of America could save this turkey of a tale, and Kurt Schaffenberger's cartoony artwork, which often fails to convey battle action in a satisfactorily dynamic manner, was certainly no help.


THIS TABLET... IT'S A LAST MESSAGE FROM MY OWN MOTHER, LARA... SAYING I HAD A TWIN BROTHER... ONE KOR-EL!
BUT... I CAN'T BE! I WAS AN ONLY CHILD! I KNOW IT!
"SUPERMAN HAS BEEN "BACK" TO KRYPTON MANY TIMES -- BOTH IN TIME TRAVEL AND VIA HIS SUPER MEMORY! -- JCH
THEN IT WAS ALL A HOAX -- DOYLE IS EXTREMELY CUNNING!
NO--IT'S NOT A HOAX! THIS TABLET IS FROM KRYPTON! JUST BEFORE THE BLOW-UP, MY X-RAY ANALYSIS PROVES IT!
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***"Prisoner of the Kryptonite Asteroid"* and *"Last Hurrah for a Superman"* were, according to Uhlenbrock, "...probably the nadir of Haney's work on the World's Finest team."**

At this point, it becomes easier to deal with each individual series as a whole; rather than treating the separate issues one-at-a-time. (This, incidentally, is one of *WF*'s chief failings. The book seldom has a whole, coherent identity. It is instead an at-random selection of usually unrelated stories, gathered together at the editor's whim.) Bob Haney scripted the Superman/Batman team through issue #255, excepting only #250, which featured a near-book-length gathering of Superman, Batman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, and the Golden Age Wonder Woman. (The sole hold-out in this Gerry Conway-scripted free-for-all was the Creeper, who had taken over Vigilante's spot in *WF #249.*) Most of the artwork in these remaining Haney-scripted issues was by Kurt Schaffenburger, whose light, nearly-humorous style proved totally inappropriate for the dark, moody Batman. George Tuska handled the art chores rather clumsily in *WFs #s 250-252* and *#254*, while J.L.G. Lopez acquitted himself quite nicely in issue #255.

Denny O'Neil assumed the scripting duties on the World's Finest Team for issues #256-64. He handled the assignment in fine style, explaining and doing away with Boltinoff & Haney's apocryphal Super-Sons, teaming the Penguin with Terra-Man, and using a shopping-bag lady named Maudy as *"The Innocent Who Hated,"* among other stirring sagas. Rich Buckler handled the bulk of the artistic chores during O'Neil's tenure on the series, illustrating *WF #s 259-261, #263,* and *#264*. His work was generally quite pleasing, if a bit heavy on the Neal Adams swipes. Murphy Anderson did the honors on issue #256, Dick Dillin pencilled #257, Garcia-Lopez was again pressed into service for #258, and Joe Staton handled #262 in a rather pedestrian fashion. Dick Giordano inked #258-265 in his distinctive style, giving the feature a certain amount of artistic continuity even when the pencillers changed from one issue to the next.

Cary Burkett scripted the next four issues (#265-68) with a heavy nostalgic feel, most notably in #267, which guest-starred the Challengers of the Un-

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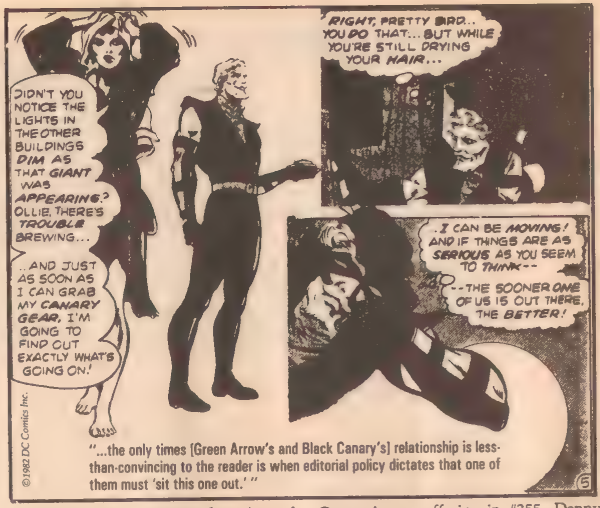
"Highlights [of Green Arrow's series] include the segments illustrated by Nasser & Austin..."

known. Ric Estrada pencilled #265, which was inked by Dick Giordano; Rich Buckler returned for #266-7; and Romeo Tanghal pencilled #268, with inking by Bob Smith. Finally, Gerry Conway has scripted the two most recent issues (#269 and #270), while Rich Buckler provided the pencils. Frank McLaughlin inked #269, while Romeo Tanghal inked #270. These efforts have all been entertaining, but not terribly inspired. Nonetheless, they are sheer brilliance when compared with the Haney/Schaffenburger/Tuska period. One incidental observation: the opening blurb, "Your Two Favorite Heroes, Superman and Batman—in One Adventure Together!", which had graced the magazine's splash page until the retirement of Mort Weisinger, was finally restored to its rightful place in *WORLD'S FINEST #255*. A small matter, to be sure—but infinitely pleasing to this reviewer for purely sentimental reasons.

The choice of Green Arrow to fill the second slot in the expanded *WORLD'S FINEST* was an obvious one—G.A. had alternated with Aquaman as the back-up feature in *WF* during Weisinger's tenure as editor, and if anything, his popularity has increased considerably since then. He has also acquired a fascinating romantic interest in the person of the Black Canary. The pair work quite effectively together—in fact, the only times their relationship is less-than-convincing to the reader is when editorial policy dictates that one of them must "sit this one out." I am not insisting that they should appear in every issue—lover's quarrels are a fact of romantic life, and altogether unavoidable when the lovers in question are two such strong-willed individuals as the Ace Archer and his Pretty Bird. What bothers me are the scenes where one of the do-gooders will charge off on the trail of a baddie, while the other one mumbles, "Have fun, honey—if you're not back in an hour, I'll come looking for you!" Such instances are transparent cases of the author writing a character out of the story for no good reason in particular.

Unfortunately, it seems that the Black Canary has been more or less written out of *WORLD'S FINEST* altogether due to space limitations. The Canary/Arrow pair appeared (together or in separate but related episodes) in *WF #244-254, 256,* and *261-262*. Since then, however, Green Arrow has had several solo adventures without Black Canary (the best she has managed is an occasional non-costumed appearance, usually in a peripheral role) in *WF #255, 257-59, 263-6,* and *268-70*. The Canary herself has been allowed only a few solo appearances (*WF #251, 256,* and *267*), and either Oliver Queen or Green Arrow was on hand—if only via a phone call—in each of them. I will refrain from charges of sexism in this case, although this policy leaves *WORLD'S FINEST* without a regularly-appearing female character since the departure of Wonder Woman in *WF #252*. (Hawkgirl, of course, is nearly always subordinated to her high-flying hubby and is currently out of the storyline entirely.) I will, however, state that —in my opinion—the simple concept of fairness should dictate that Green Arrow and Black Canary alternate appearances if the writer feels that two superheroes working as both a romantic and battle team are too much for the plot. Any other policy leaves DC open to a class-action suit which could be filed retroactively by the National Organization for Women.


DIDN'T YOU NOTICE THE LIGHTS IN THE OTHER BUILDINGS DIM AS THAT GIANT WAS APPEARING? OLLIE, THERE'S TROUBLE BREWING...
..AND JUST AS SOON AS I CAN GRAB MY CANARY GEAR, I'M GOING TO FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT'S GOING ON!
RIGHT, PRETTY BIRD.. YOU DO THAT... BUT WHILE YOU'RE STILL DRYING YOUR HAIR...
..I CAN BE MOVING! AND IF THINGS ARE AS SERIOUS AS YOU SEEM TO THINK--
-THE SOONER ONE OF US IS OUT THERE, THE BETTER!
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"...the only times [Green Arrow's and Black Canary's] relationship is less-than-convincing to the reader is when editorial policy dictates that one of them must 'sit this one out.'"

Creatively speaking, the GA/BC duo was scripted almost entirely by Gerry Conway (*WF #245-54, 261-2*). Conway also authored the Green Arrow solo adventure which appeared in *WORLD'S FINEST #258-259*. The latter issue, by the way, featured a brief costumed appearance by Black Canary, who was promptly injured—necessitating Green Arrow's strategic retreat to the Justice League satellite to tend her wounds, while Hawkman took up the fight in tag-team fashion. Additionally, Conway scripted the Black Canary tale in *WF #256*, while Elliot Maggin handled the Green Arrow offering in #255, Denny O'Neil presented the Green Arrow/Black Lightning meeting in #256, Paul Kupperberg scripted the Ace Archer's offerring in #257, and Bud Simon penned the "*G.A.*" adventure in #268. Bob Haney has been the series' regular author since *WF #263* (and here his pseudo-hip dialogue seems perfectly in keeping with Green Arrow's knee-jerk liberalism), handling the GA tales in *WORLD'S FINEST #263-266* and *#269-270*, as well as the Black Canary story which appeared in *WF #267*. Artistically, the series has been handled by Nasser & Austin (*WF #244-246*), Sal Amendola (*WF #247*), Jerry Bingham (the Green Arrow segment of *WF #251*), Dick Dillin (the GA/Black Lightning team-up in #256), Jose Delbo (Black Canary in #256, Green Arrow in #258), Don Newton (the G.A./Hawkman cross-over in #259), Alex Saviuk (#261), and Romeo Tanghal (#262). Special mention goes to Trevor Von Eeden, whose work has appeared in *WORLD'S FINEST #s 248-249, 252-254,* and *263-270*. Highlights include the segments illustrated by Nasser & Austin, the Vertigo series in #251 and 252, the *"Oliver Queen for Mayor"* story in #255, and the Green Arrow/Hawkman cross-over in #259. Lowest points of the series occurred in #248-9, when Martin Deleon correctly deduced that Oliver Queen had a costumed alter-ego—but mistakenly assumed that Queen was actually the Batman (ignoring the obvious blond deduction, despite the give-away blond

IT'S A GOOD THING THESE DUDES'RE STILL GROGGY FROM THE EXPLOSION!
IMAGINE, I BATTLE AS MY FATHER DID ALONGSIDE THE REAL VIGILANTE!
AW, TWENTY YEARS AIN'T SO BAD.

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"...even Gray Morrow's wonderfully moody illustrations in subsequent issues failed to lift [the *'Vigilante'*] strip from its doldrums."

beard); and in *WF #261-263*, when Green Arrow and Black Canary battled the infinitely hokey Auntie Gravity, who would have been more at home in a Hostess Twinkies ad.

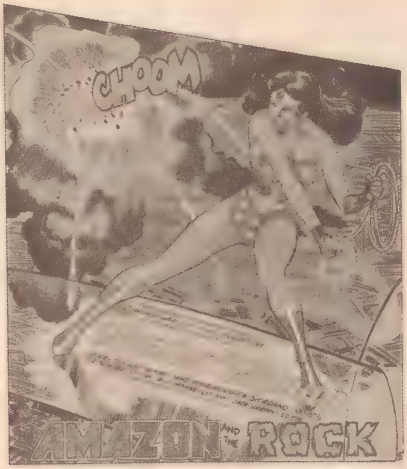
The Vigilante's short-lived solo series in *WORLD'S FINEST #244-248* proved one very important point: DC honestly wants to be responsive to the readers' desires with this book. When they discovered that nobody particularly cared one way or the other about the Vigilante (a second-rate character even in his heyday), he was unceremoniously dumped in favor of the Creeper. Bill Kunkel's mediocre scripting was certainly no great help in the Vigilante's futile attempt at attaining popularity with a modern-day audience. The John Calnan/Bob Smith artwork on the initial episode matched Kunkel's script perfectly for lack of inspiration, but even Gray Morrow's wonderfully moody illustrations in subsequent issues failed to lift this strip from its doldrums. When the series was dropped with *WF #248*, it was almost a form of mercy-killing.

Steve Ditko's *"Creeper"* took over Vigilante's spot in *#249*, and held it only slightly longer than its original occupant, finally bowing out in *#255*. Ditko's uniquely bizarre artwork is always welcomed by this critic, and the Creeper is a fascinating character (if somewhat quirky)—but Ditko was given permission to script the series, in addition to plotting and drawing it. He quickly proved himself to be a member of the Jack Kirby Memorial "Artists Who Can't Write To Save Their Lives" Club. Throughout its run, the strip was an anomaly; possessed of extravagant, fast-paced artwork and unreadable, nearly-embarrassing scripts.

The slot finally found a permanent resident on the third try, when Hawkman flew onto the scene in *WORLD'S FINEST #256*. The Winged Wonder has "ruled the roost" ever since, relinquishing his spot in the line-up only twice since then. The first time was in *WF #260*, when a planned cut-back to the 40¢ size was ruled unnecessary, catching DC with their deadlines down. Inventoried material was quickly scheduled to fill the gap, and Hawkman was absent from that issue. The second missed appearance was in *WF #263*, when he allowed his old friend Adam Strange to sub for him—after saving Adam's hide in the previous issue.

Steve Englehart scripted the first Hawkman tale rather perfunctorily, while Murphy Anderson handled the artwork in a similar manner. Gerry Conway authored the next three Hawkman tales (*WF #257-259*) quite nicely—especially *#259*, which featured the aforementioned Green Arrow/Hawkman team-up. Rich Buckler and Romeo Tanghal handled the art assignment in *#257-8*, while Don Newton and Dave Hunt illustrated *#259*. *WORLD'S FINEST #261* carried something called a *"JLA Databank Dossier"* (which was actually nothing more than a four-page summary of Hawkman's career), scripted by Bob Rozakis and rendered by Ed Barretto & Dave Simons. J.M. deMatteis scripted the Hawkman/Adam Strange offering in *WF #262*, as well as the next two Hawkman tales (*WF #264-265*). All three of these stories carried hefty doses of science fiction, leavened well with carefully-considered amounts of characterization. Ken Landgraf and Armando Gil illustrated the series throughout deMatteis' tenure as scripter. Bob Rozakis was the next (and current) scribe to handle the Hawkpeople's affairs (*WF #266-270*), involving them with a group of giant insects and their creator, Lord Insectus (and leaving one very loose end: who is responsible for the creation of Insectus himself?), infecting Hawkman with a sting from one of the mutated insects, and bringing the Hawks back to their home planet, Thanagar, in search of a cure for the fever ravaging his body. Hawkgirl was given a rare chance to shine in *WF #269-270*, which featured the return of Hyanthis and the Shadow Thief. Landgraf and Rodin Rodriguez handled the art chores in *#266*, while Alex Saviuk and Rodriguez have been responsible for all subsequent issues (*WF #267-270*). All things considered, this series has been quite enjoyable; blending believable science-fiction by Conway, deMatteis, and Rozakis, with an occasional down-to-Earth adventure.

The *"Wonder Woman"* series which ran in *WORLD'S FINEST #244-252* is probably the most relentlessly mediocre series to appear in *WF* thus far. This is partially attributable to DC's decision to run WWII-era Wonder Woman stories (featuring the Earth-II Amazon) in order to match the television series which was appearing on ABC-TV at that time. Unfortunately, television and comic books are two different media, each with entirely different needs. The only television super-hero who had super-*villains* to oppose was Batman, and we all know what happened to *him*. The televised Wonder Woman was content to battle ordinary Nazis—the comic book Wonder Woman, on the other hand, needed super-Nazis. These were created, issue-after-issue, one right after the other—none of them with enough spark to start a car. None of them individual enough



"Perhaps the only memorable Wonder Woman tales during this period..." guest-starred Sgt. Rock and were "...enlivened by the artwork of Mike Vosburg."

to rouse the interest of even the most dedicated Wonder Woman fan. Quick, now: does anyone out there remember the Iron Claw? How about Baron Blitzkrieg? Perhaps the only memorable Wonder Woman tales during this period appeared in *WF #248-249*, which guest-starred Sgt. Rock and featured the villainy of Dr. Psycho (an authentic foe of the Golden Age Amazon). These tales were enlivened by the artwork of Mike Vosburg, who seems to enjoy drawing super-heroines—most of his work has featured women quite prominently, from Starfire at the beginning of his career, to his recent assignment at Marvel, the She-Hulk. Gerry Conway scripted nearly all of Wonder Woman's run in *WORLD'S FINEST* (*#245-252*), excepting only #244, which was written by Denny O'Neil. Jose Delbo and Vince Colletta illustrated #244 and #247 in a very pedestrian fashion, James Sherman and Bob Wiacek turned in a fine-looking job for #245, Don Heck and Colletta butchered #246, Vosburg delivered #248-9 (with inking by Dick Giordano in the first part and Bob Smith in the second), Ric Estrada and Jack Abel handled #251, and Abel & Colletta contributed #252. The modern-day Wonder Woman finally returned for issues #251-2, which featured Poison Ivy and her untold origin, but by this time the damage was done. The readers were not interested in seeing Wonder Woman (they seldom *have* been), and she was replaced by another important super-star as of *WORLD'S FINEST #253*.

"Shazam!" With one magic word (and two equally-magical creators), the original Captain Marvel was on the scene. Believe it or not, the entirety of his adventures in *WORLD'S FINEST (#254-270)* have been the work of a single writer and a single penciller, with only the inkers changing from time to time. E. Nelson Bridwell had long ago proven himself to be the kingpin of light-hearted story-telling (notably in the excellent and sadly-departed *SUPER-FRIENDS*), and Captain Marvel was obviously in capable hands with E.N.B. at the helm. More surprisingly by far was the assignment of Don Newton to the artistic chores. At that time, Newton had only handled the straight-arrow serious Aquaman and the dark, moody Batman. Who would have expected him to work so well on the basically frivolous Captain Marvel? It almost seems as if DC was hedging their bets on the subject for a time, because long-time Captain Marvel artist Kurt Schaffenburger was named as inker of the series for *WF #253-259*. . . but it soon became obvious that Newton had the situation well in hand, and Schaffenburger's finishing touches were ruled unecessary. Dave Hunt became the series' steady inker for a time (*WF #260-264*), followed by Francisco Chiaramonte (#265), Joe Giella (#266), Bob Smith (#267), Steve Mitchell (#268), Dan Adkins (#269), and Larry Mahlstead (#270).

Bridwell's enchanting scripts have walked a difficult tightrope indeed; encompassing whimsy as well as serious super-heroics, characterization in addition to slam-bang action. He has spotlighted Captain Marvel Jr., Mary Marvel, and more obscure Fawcett heroes such as Bulletman and Bulletgirl; he has revived the Monster Society of Evil and has given a pseudo-scientific explanation for the quasi-human talking tiger, Mr. Tawny. Perhaps the only thing that E.N.B. has *not* done is bore this reviewer, who was never much of a Captain Marvel fan—until now.

Nor was this reviewer particularly enamored of the Red Tornado prior to his solo series in *WORLD'S FINEST #265-270*; and my opinion has not changed. Jose Delbo's flat, uninspiring artwork is a perfect complement to the most boring character DC has ever inflicted upon the reading public. The Whining Whirlwind has no place in a comic supposedly dedicated to the finest characters in DC's stable. Additionally, Gerry Conway's depiction of the Tornado as being more sensitive, more caring, and more *human* than most of humanity strikes me as an unforgivable insult to sentient beings the world over. The series' scripters (J.M. deMatteis in *WF #265-267*, Gerry Conway in *WF #268-270*) take great pains to present the Tornado's foes as malicious beings whose only purpose in life is their maliciousness. The Future Man, Madame Redclaw, and the Robot Killer possess not even the smallest identifiably human quirks (as does most of, say, the Flash's Rogues Gallery) by which we might come to recognize them as kin to ourselves. The result is that these caricatures are little more than straw men, set up solely to be knocked down by a tin man—with whom we are then supposed to identify.

It just won't wash. This is a supremely cynical series, despite its trappings of moralism and piety. It cynically assumes that we will accept its cardboard cut-out villains, its empty-headed supporting characters, and its mealy-mouthed machinery masquerading as a man, at face value. The series is, in the final analysis, so much rusty junk, already over-due for the scrap-heap.

There have also been a few short-lived (or one-shot) series that have surfaced briefly in the pages of *WORLD'S FINEST*. Black Lightning was the first and

most prominent of these, and it is unfortunate that this obvious but laudable attempt to integrate the ranks of DC's super-doers has met with scant success. His brief run in *WF #257-61* was marked by above-average scripting (courtesy of Denny O'Neil) and average (George Tuska, Rich Buckler, Romeo Tanghal) to exceptional artwork (Mike Nasser and Marshall Rogers). Jefferson Pierce is obviously a concerned, compassionate individual, and remarkably human when compared with such stern-jawed, four-square marble statues as Superman and Batman. Nonetheless, he currently resides in comic-book limbo, his spot in the magazine usurped by that paragon of humanity, the Red Tornado.

The Atom appeared in *WORLD'S FINEST #260*, courtesy of writer Bob Rozakis, artists Juan Ortiz and Vince Colletta, and the previously-noted scheduling snafu. It was an entirely forgettable outing, as was Aquaman's short-lived run in *WORLD'S FINEST #262-264*. Bob Rozakis scripted all three of the Aquaman adventures as if he was trying to find an inexpensive substitute for Sominex. He succeeded. Don Newton and Dan Adkins illustrated #262 admirably enough, but Jose Delbo proved incapable of generating even the smallest amount of excitement for the remaining two episodes, whether inked by Francisco Chiaramonte in the first tale, or Kim deMulder in the second.

Odds-and-ends, odds-and-ends: The covers for *WORLD'S FINEST* have generally been quite pleasing, especially #253-8, which were wrap-around affairs. Neal Adams contributed the covers to *WF #244-246* and the front half of #258 (the back of which was provided

WHICH SHALL WE TAIL?
HOME YET! I HEAR A SWORDFIGHT AROUND BENEATH THE THRONE!
RRMMP
"...the only thing E.N.B. has *not* done [in *"Shazam!"*] is bore this reviewer..."
AS I THOUGHT-- ONE OF THE SERVANT GODS-- SNORING!
IT'S LAZINESS-- ONE OF THE SEVEN DEADLY ENEMIES OF MAN! THEY MUST BE EVIL'S SERVANTS!
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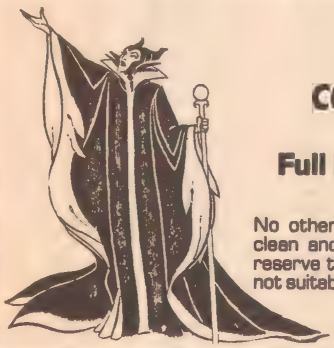
by his old partner, Dick Giordano); Garcia-Lopez and Giordano provided #247-8; Jim Aparo illustrated #249-55, 257, 265, and 266; Ross Andru and Giordano handled #256 as well as #261-3; Rich Buckler and Giordano offered #259-60, 267, and 269-70; while Giordano soloed on #264 and 268. Of late, the back cover has been the home of *"The Daily Planet,"* DC's answer to Marvel's *"Bullpen Bulletins."* It is, to say the least, preferable to ads for Daisy B.B. guns and other such monuments to American consumer-oriented culture.

Which brings us back to our original starting point: the consumer. You and me. The poor working slob (or even poorer school-age child) who is being asked to fork over one dollar of his or her hard-earned culture in exchange for each and every issue of *WORLD'S FINEST COMICS*. Are we truly getting our money's worth?

The answer to that question varies, according to fluctuations in the nation's economy and the size/price ratio of other newsstand comics. When the book was first promoted to the larger format, DC produced all manner of mathematical meanderings, intended to make the readers feel that they were actually getting *more* for their money in a Dollar Comic. Today, with regular DC comics priced at 60¢ for 25 pages or so of story-and-art, we are actually being slightly short-changed by the $1/48 page product. . . unless one cares to put a price-tag on the fact that these Dollar Comics contained no ads! If pressed for an answer on this subject, I would have to respond with an unqualified "maybe."

On one matter, however, my opinion is quite inflexible. Although this magazine is quite entertaining at times, it is a far cry from being a compilation of the finest comics in the world. It is instead a masterpiece of the mundane; a monument to mediocrity. ●



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End NOTES

by Peter Sanderson
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In the Terrytoon *THE POWER OF THOUGHT* the talking magpies Heckle and Jeckle gain an insight into the nature of the medium which they inhabit. Anything, they realize, is possible in an animated cartoon, and so they proceed to abuse a poor canine policeman by transforming themselves into various objects and defying natural laws left and right. The dog finally captures his tormentors when he realizes that he too is a cartoon character, and that therefore anything he imagines can likewise become "reality" in his world. This, after all, is the potential of the cartoon, whether it takes the form of an animated film, a comics story, or whatever: it can portray a world in which whatever fantasy the cartoonist can imagine and draw is a "reality." In our world magpies with human intelligence do not exist, but in a cartoon they can.

The work of Caza, which often appears in the United States in English translation in *HEAVY METAL*, often seems centered on the idea of the cartoon as a medium of fantasy. Often his stories' central characters, usually bespectacled, bearded men, start out in an everyday reality and then something fantastic occurs, as in *"The March Hair"* (I am using *HEAVY METAL*'s titles for the stories), in which, ultimately to his delight, flowers begin growing in the hero's hair. In *"New Ark City"* the everyman figure finds himself alone in a great metropolis during a heat wave that has driven everyone else off on vacations. His apartment building begins to fill with playful, friendly animals, two of each kind (appealing animals again and again have been the stuff from which cartoons are made). Realizing that a great flood is coming, the everyman transforms his animal-filled building into a kind of ark, and joined by a seductive-looking woman, sets sail on the waters of the flood, which both destroy the old world and, presumably, promise a new one. The Noah allusion is obvious, but at the story's end we see a primal fantasy cast in new form: a "world" populated by two loving humans and friendly animals. The story's hero has recreated Eden, and there is no sign of a future Fall. In *"Shipwreck"* the everyman is sitting in his apartment daydreaming about paddling a boat, when suddenly he finds himself swallowed up by a real ocean, in which he finds beautiful sights, but which is nevertheless a world of death. Skeletons lie near treasures, a gigantic octopus tries to capture the hero, and there is the obvious threat of drowning. But he finally makes it to the surface and is last seen living on an exotic island with a beautiful woman in another variation on the Eden myth.

"[Caza's] fantasies can be negative as well as positive..."

Why create such fantasies? Two other stories explain why. In *"Suburban Scenes: December"* the everyman figure decides he must eliminate all inspiration to fantasize because his fantasies merely emphasize—through contrast—the grimness of real life. Beautiful colors inspire fantasies in him, so he paints his room grey. But then the plaster begins to fall in white bits, and, smiling, he realizes that it makes him think of snow, which fills the final panel. The tendency to imagine a better world is an unstoppable compulsion, presumably because people need to escape, if only in their imagination, from the mundaneness and pains of life. Hence in *"Shipwreck"* and *"New Ark City"* the everyman did indeed literally escape into fantasy worlds, and when he fantasizes in this story, what he imagines takes the place in the panel of his "real" world.

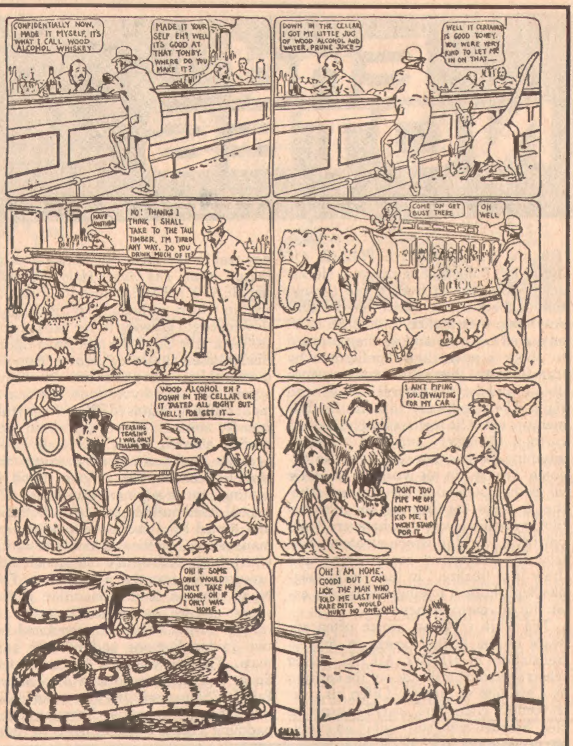
"Romance" makes the point even more strongly. It opens with a woman contemplating suicide. She decides instead to phone a "fantasy service" for help, and a man dressed as a troubadour comes to her apartment and sings to her. His art—his song and the image his costume and role creates—reawakens happiness and romantic feelings within her. The final panels reveal that her visitor was not a real troubadour somehow

come from the past but only a modern-day man to whom this visit was just part of his job for the day. He was not moved by his art; he simply created a fantasy for the woman which had no reality to it. But the point is that she was moved by it, that she believes in its beauty, and that it renewed her will to live.

But fantasies can be negative as well as positive, frightening rather than soothing. Remember that the everyman of *"Shipwreck"* had to pass through an underwater world of death before he reached his paradise. His fantasy world was at first that of a nightmare, through which he had to pass to reach his ideal world. Cartoons deal in nightmare worlds as well as in happily fanciful ones. Sometimes a nightmare can be evoked and then neutralized by humor, as in the work of Charles Addams and Gahan Wilson, for example. In Caza's *"Whoodoo The Voodoo"* a man's horrendous disfigurement and (perhaps) accidental death at the hands of the everyman figure, who has been secretly working voodoo upon him (just as a cartoonist can send his characters to terrible fates?), is treated as a grotesque joke. In Caza's *"Suburban Scenes: November"* a man rises from bed to investigate sounds from above him, and ends up looking out from a coffin surrounded by grim figures in the middle of a graveyard. The cartoonist thus brings his readers to confront the idea of death while easing the shock with humor. Sometimes Caza does not mitigate the chilling effect, as in the paranoid fantasy *"Metropolitan Opera,"* which ends with the everyman imprisoned by a police state for a minor error.

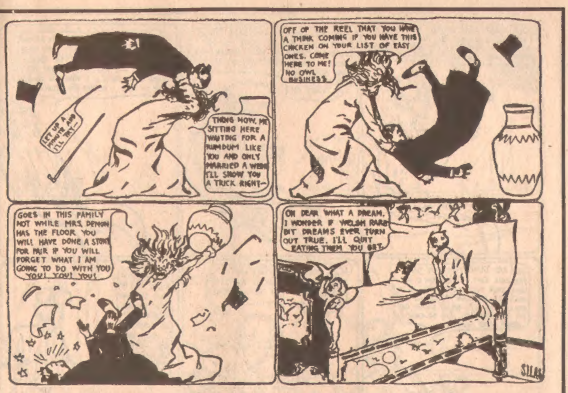
The comics series that most concerns itself with nightmare fantasy is Winsor McCay's *DREAMS OF THE RAREBIT FIEND*, along with his other related "dream" series from the early decades of this century. (Most of the individual installments I will mention can be found in Dover Press' reprinting of McCay's 1905 book collection of *RAREBIT FIEND.*) Like McCay's more famous strip *LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND, RAREBIT FIEND* follows the formulaic pattern of starting out within the world of a dream, following that dream to a climactic point, and then reverting to the real world as the dreamer awakens in the final panel. Despite the greatly superior beauty, detail, and "sense of wonder" to be found in *NEMO*, however, I find myself preferring *RAREBIT FIEND* due to the psychological implications of the dreams in the latter.

The introduction to the 1905 collection of *RAREBIT FIEND* strips acknowledges that their purpose is both to amuse and to chill: the dream-inducing rarebits, we are told, "have caused many people to laugh and some, perchance, to weep; for it frequently happens that [which] is one man's food is another's poison." The child Nemo often dreams of terrors, but his Slumberland is also a world filled with beauty, a land that combines a child's nightmares with his wish-fulfillment fantasies. The rarebits, on the other hand, almost invariably play upon the fears of the dreamers who have eaten them. The introduction tells us matter-of-factly about a scientific experiment in which rarebit consumers were hooked up to what today we would call television screens that would show what they were dreaming. It turned out that "the rarebit eaters were troubled by visions of a distressing nature. Armadilloes, red serpents, green street cars, and innumerable objects were portrayed upon the screens as they passed through the disordered faculties of the dreamers."


CONFIDENTIALLY NOW, I MADE IT MYSELF. IT'S WHAT I CALL WOOD ALCOHOL WHISKEY
MADE IT YOUR SELF EH? WELL IT'S GOOD AT THAT TOMBY. WHERE DO YOU MAKE IT?
DOWN IN THE CELLAR I GOT MY LITTLE JUG OF WOOD ALCOHOL AND WATER, PRUNE JUICE
WELL IT CLEARS IS GOOD TOMEY. YOU WERE VERY KIND TO LET ME IN ON THAT
HAVE ANOTHER
NO! THANKS I THINK I SHALL TAKE TO THE TAIL TIMBER. I'M THERE ANY WAY. DO YOU DRINK MUCH OF IT?
COME ON GET BUST THERE
OH WELL
WOOD ALCOHOL EH? DOWN IN THE CELLAR, EH IT TASTED ALL RIGHT BUT WELL! FOR GET IT
TEASING TEASING WAS ONLY TALKING
I AIN'T PIPING YOU. I'M WAITING FOR MY CAB
DON'T YOU PIPE ME EH? DON'T YOU KID ME. I WON'T STAND FOR IT
OH! IF SOME ONE WOULD ONLY TAKE ME HOME, OH IF I ONLY WAS HOME
OH! I AM HOME. GOOD! BUT I CAN LICK THE MAN WHO TOLD ME LAST NIGHT RAREBITS WOULD HURT ME. SHE ONE!

"The nature of the hallucinations...may lead one to think that *RAREBIT FIEND*'s primary tone is that of humorous absurdity."

The nature of the hallucinations just described may lead one to think that *RAREBIT FIEND*'s primary tone is that of humorous absurdity. But then look at the most unnerving strip in the book. Caza's cemetery story was startling, but this surpasses it. The "point of view" of the "camera" in the dream sequence panels is that of a man who is immobile and considered dead by one and all. There are no thought balloons or captions to indicate what is going through the supposedly dead man's mind, but one can well imagine what he is feeling. The "deceased" sees his wife and everyone else saying nothing but negative


OFF OF THE REEL THAT YOU HAVE A THINK COMING IF YOU HAVE THIS CHICKEN ON YOUR LIST OF EASY OMES. COME HERE TO ME! NO OWL BUSINESS
THERE NOW, I'M SITTING HERE WAITING FOR A NUMBSKIM LIKE YOU AND ONLY MARRIED A WEEK! I'LL SHOW YOU A TRICK, RIGHT—
GOES IN THIS FAMILY NOT WHILE MRS. DEMON HAS THE FLOOR. YOU WILL HAVE DONE A STORK FOR FAIR IF YOU WILL FORGET WHAT I AM GOING TO DO WITH YOU YOU! YOU! YOU!
OH DEAR WHAT A DREAM. I WONDER IF WOLFAN RARE'S DREAMS EVER TURN OUT TRUE. I'LL QUIT EATING THEM YOU BET.
STILES

"[*RAREBIT FIEND*'s] last panel can provide information that better allows the reader to comprehend the implications of the dream."

things about him. He sees his wife responding to the advances of one of the so-called mourners during the funeral. The minister tells the assemblage that "Death in this case is a blessing not only to his wife but to the whole community. He was absolutely no good." Finally, again, as always, from the point of view of the supposed corpse, we see the earth being shoveled into the grave, burying him—and, in effect, us—alive. The last panel shows the dreamer waking up in terror. But he is not simply suffering from a fear of death, which is, of course, bad enough: his words indicate that he also feels consumed by guilt. Apparently there may have been some truth to the accusations in the dream that he led a dissolute life. A *RAREBIT* cartoon is not simply based on a macabre turn of events in a dream; it is also founded in the personality of the character who serves as the dreamer. Besides guilt and fear of mortality, this particular installment also reveals the dreamer's fear of losing a loved one (his wife), his fear of being friendless, and his terror of being treated not as a human being who deserves respect and affection, but as a mere object. ("He'll make good fuel," comments the dreamer's wife after he is lowered into the grave.)

"A *RAREBIT* cartoon is not simply based on a macabre turn of events in a dream; it is also founded in the personality of the...dreamer."

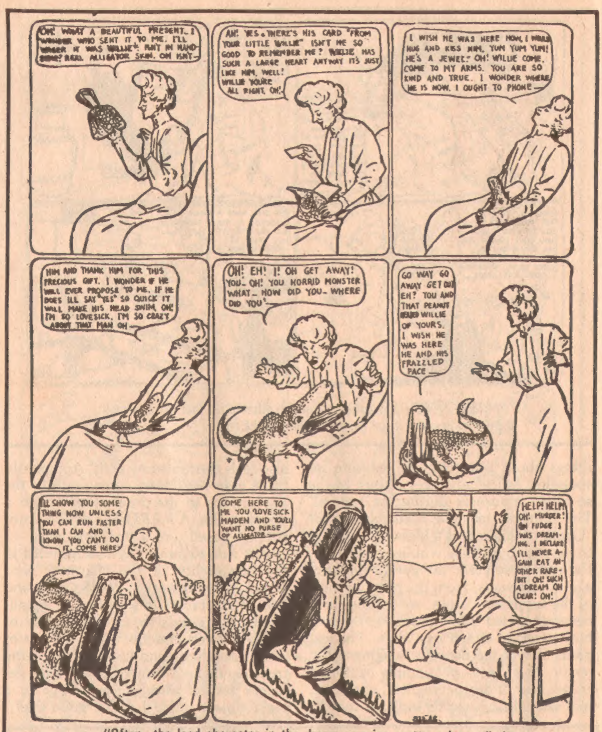
I DO SO LOVE THE SPRING TIME. I LOVE TO STROLL OUT IN THE MORNING AIR. BALMY SPRING, NO WONDER THE POETS GO DAFFY WHEN THE BIRDS BEGIN TO SING— HERE COMES A MAN WHO IS A RINGER FOR ME VERY IMAGE, HUH!
I BEG YOUR PARDON, MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF YOUR ACQUAINTANCE SINCE WE SO RESEMBLE—
I AM YOU. YOU ARE ME. I AM MYSELF. I OUGHT TO KNOW MYSELF, I AM ASHAMED—
HOLD ON THERE! I AM ME!
DO YOU CLAIM TO BE ME?
I CLAIM I AM ME, THATS IT. I AM ME, I—
OH WRONG THERE! ME IS I. I AM
WE ARE OURSELVES I AM WE.
I AM US. WE ARE US, I, ME.
IT'S A LITTLE MIXED.
I AM A— SHAMED OF MYSELF.
DO I STUT? AM ME!
I AM I, YES

One can further see from this episode the importance of the relationship between the dream sequence and the concluding panel, in which the sleeper wakes. That last panel can provide information that better allows the reader to comprehend the implications of the dream. For example, in another installment a man in formal dress rises to address an important gathering, but keeps stumbling over the pronunciation of the word "welcoming." He can neither pronounce it correctly, nor, it seems, get past it; the man becomes drenched in perspiration, and his eyes take on a look of both hysteria and exhaustion, as he keeps trying to pronounce the word. Meanwhile the rest of the people on the dais turn visibly bored, and finally begin leaving in disgust, while the speaker's wife is both appalled and overcome with worry for her husband. It would seem to be a particularly horrifying variation on the infamous "actor's dream," in which an actor finds himself onstage but unable to think of what to say. But then, surprisingly, the last panel reveals that the dreamer is actually the speaker's wife. Presumably she both loves her husband and takes great pride in him, and one of her deepest fears is that he should suffer public humiliation.

DREAMS OF THE RAREBIT FIEND may be formulaic, but it is amazing how much that McCay was able to do within this seemingly-restrictive format. He devised an endless variety of weird turns of events for the nightmares and dealt with a very wide range of human anxieties. There was the fear of losing one's identity, expressed in a *RAREBIT* in which a man found himself surrounded by duplicates of himself, and the related fear of being denied all the protections of civilization that guarantees one's safety and position in society. The latter fear turns up in a missionary's dream in which the "heathen" he intends to "educate" turn out to be well-spoken cannibals who strip him, sell him ("I'll give you 8¢ a pound"), and cook and serve him as if he were a roast turkey ("I want a wing and some stuffin'."). The series deals with suppressed sexual desires, fears and guilts. A man walks around town wearing a woman's hat and is pursued by police. A newly married man dreams that his wife turns into a grotesque hag who violently throws him about. A husband is caught kissing a female cigar store Indian that has come to life, is sued for divorce by his wife, and is forced to pay her "$5000.00 a minute in alimony." One very familiar fear is dramatized in a strip in which a dentist uses a chisel and

hammer on a patient, then a crowbar, thereby elongating her neck by two feet, and finally dynamite. A commuter feeling guilty over not having paid his fare finds the conductor's face, grown to enormous size, hovering over him. Repressed desires of other sorts emerge. A minister dreams of becoming a compulsive drinker, consuming entire vats of liquor. A slight man bloodily beats up six boxers and on awakening remarks, "I wonder what dreaming of blood means." A wish-fulfillment fantasy can come to ruin: an old man married to a young woman wishes for his youth to be restored, and devolves into a mere baby. Obsessions go to incredible extremes. The annoying corn on a woman's foot grows into an actual, and very tall, cornstalk. Another woman, afraid that a train will run over her precious dog, brings the train to a halt by butting it with her head.

Similarly, in another episode, the dreamer herself never appears. Instead we see her husband, who loses his limbs one by one to speeding cars, and is finally totally dismembered. Obviously the woman fears losing her husband and is very concerned over what she believes to be his carelessness about danger. One could also read a Freudian subtext into this dream: the loss of the man's limbs could symbolize castration. Yet shocking as this dream is, it is nevertheless humorous, as most of the *RAREBIT* strips are. The humor often comes from the absurdly extreme nature of the fates with which *RAREBIT* characters meet in their dreams. In the case of this particular installment, what happens to the husband is absurd and extreme indeed, but it would not be funny as well if not for his reaction. He does not cry out in anguish or fear but simply acts annoyed, like a crotchety old man scolding children for throwing snowballs at him. The disparity between the magnitude of the harm he is suffering and his relatively mild reaction to it creates the humor. Often in *RAREBIT* the lead character in the dream remains pretty calm until the next to last panel—in which he panics—or he may stay fairly passive throughout. This adds to the dreamlike nature of the strip. As in a real dream, the characters move through their nightmares passively, unable to alter the course of events and sometimes unconcerned about them. For example, in another installment two men are driving about in an automobile, running over animals and people. The passenger looks sickened by the carnage, but he cannot stop it; the driver actually enjoys creating all this suffering and death ("Hear the bones cracking, can you beat it?") although he

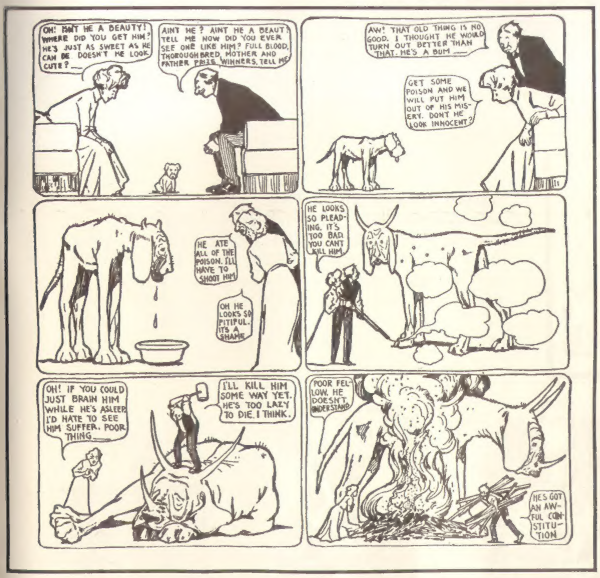

OH! WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PRESENT... I WONDER WHO SENT IT TO ME... I'LL WONDER IF WILLIE'S HAT IN HAND-PAINTED REAL ALLIGATOR SKIN... OH HIM!
AH! YES, THERE'S HIS CARD "FROM YOUR LITTLE WILLIE" ISN'T HE SO GOOD TO REMEMBER ME? WILLIE HAS SUCH A LARGE HEART ANYWAY ITS JUST LIKE HIM, WELL! WILLIE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT, OH!
I WISH HE WAS HERE NOW, I WOULD HUG AND KISS HIM, YUM YUM YUM! HE'S A JEWEL! OH! WILLIE COME, COME TO MY ARMS. YOU ARE SO KIND AND TRUE. I WONDER WHERE HE IS NOW. I OUGHT TO PHONE!
HIM AND THANK HIM FOR THIS PRECIOUS GIFT. I WONDER IF HE WILL EVER PROPOSE TO ME. IF HE DOES I'LL SAY "YES" SO QUICK IT WILL MAKE HIS HEAD SWIM, ONE IN SO LOVESICK I'M SO CRAZY ABOUT THAT MAN OH
OH! EH! I? OH GET AWAY! YOU- OH! YOU HORRID MONSTER WHAT- HOW DID YOU- WHERE DID YOU?
GO WAY GO AWAY GET OUT EH? YOU AND THAT PEANUT HEADED WILLIE OF YOURS. I WISH HE WAS HERE HE AND HIS FRAZZLED FACE
I'LL SHOW YOU SOME THING NOW UNLESS YOU CAN RUN FASTER THAN I CAN AND I KNOW YOU CAN'T DO IT. COME HERE
COME HERE TO ME YOU SICK MAIDEN AND YOU'LL WANT NO PURSE OF ALLIGATOR
HELP! HELP! OH! MURDER! OH FUDGE I WAS DREAMING. I DECLARE I'LL NEVER AGAIN EAT ANOTHER RARE-BIT. OH! SUCH A DREAM OH DEAR! OH!
SICAK.

"Often...the lead character in the dream remains pretty calm until the next to last panel—in which he panics..."

would surely be appalled at the idea of thus venting his violent subconscious impulses in real life.

Of course the "happy ending" provided by the "awakening" panel also makes each strip a comedy: the threatened disaster did not occur, and the victim is actually safe and sound. But although the nightmare was unreal, like the troubadour business in Caza's *"Romance,"* the emotional effect it produced was very real. The reader may be amused, but the dreamer was shaken by his nightmare, and with the most powerful *RAREBIT* strips, the reader should feel somewhat uneasy as well.

But in some *RAREBIT*s the humor almost totally outweighs the serious element. The theme of the loss of a loved one is the subject of an ultimately somber *RAREBIT* about euthanasia, but it also serves as the basis for a *RAREBIT* that is one of the funniest. This one (which is on display at the Museum of Cartoon Art in Port Chester, NY) begins with two Edwardian-era lovers seated on a couch, a tiger rug at their feet, exchanging what might most generously be termed sweet nothings. In fact, they are speaking the most banal and insipid love scene dialogue imaginable. Finally the tiger rug comes to life, saying "Nope. I can't stand it any longer. Who do you think I am?" and swallows one of the two bores. Now, of course, there are serious elements to this sequence. The dreamer cares deeply about her beloved, or does she? She obviously recognized in her dream that the two of them are rather banal people. Is the tiger in fact acting out her own wish to put an end to a relationship she subconsciously hates? But this is all subtextual. The cartoon's immediate effect is to create humor. We


OH! ISN'T HE A BEAUTY! WHERE DO YOU GET HIM? HE'S JUST AS SWEET AS HE CAN BE DOESN'T HE LOOK CUTE?
AINT HE? AINT HE A BEAUT! TELL ME NOW DID YOU EVER SEE ONE LIKE HIM? FULL BLOOD, THOROUGH BRED, MOTHER AND FATHER PRIZE WINNERS, TELL ME
AW! THAT OLD THING IS NO GOOD. I THOUGHT HE WOULD TURN OUT BETTER THAN THAT. HE'S A BUM
GET SOME POISON AND WE WILL PUT HIM OUT OF HIS MISERY. DON'T HE LOOK INNOCENT?
HE ATE ALL OF THE POISON. I'LL HAVE TO SHOOT HIM
OH HE LOOKS SO PITIFUL. IT'S A SHAME
HE LOOKS SO PLEADING. IT'S TOO BAD YOU CAN'T KILL HIM
OH! IF YOU COULD JUST BRAIN HIM WHILE HE'S ASLEEP I'D HATE TO SEE HIM SUFFER. POOR THING
I'LL KILL HIM SOME WAY YET. HE'S TOO LAZY TO DIE I THINK.
POOR FELLOW, HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND
HE'S GOT AN AWFUL CONSTITUTION

know that the events it depicts are unreal, and the lovers' dialogue prevents us from thinking of them as more than caricatures, and so there is only laughter to be derived from seeing these two pay in such an absurd way for being insufferably trite and saccharine. There is very little seriousness in some other *RAREBIT*s at all. One has a tramp catapulted into a luxury hotel by an explosion. He asks the bellboy for water and gets sprayed with a fire hose. McCay parodies his strip's formula in a sequence about a married couple desperately seeking a place to live. Nothing fantastic happens in the dream, but on awakening the husband complains, 'I've just had the worst dream I ever experienced. I dreamed we lived in Brooklyn. Rarebits are funny things, ain't they? Oh ho!"

Occasionally, however, a *RAREBIT* dreamer imagines a positive wish-fulfillment fantasy. In one sequence a giant strides through New York City, pushing over a building, carrying off an ocean liner and tearing apart Wall Street. It turns out that the dreamer is an imprisoned criminal. Another *RAREBIT* dream finds a long-time loser at gambling finally winning a fortune.

McCay was also the first great master of the animated film, known especially for creating animation's first "funny-animal" star, Gertie the Dinosaur, and for his breathtaking portrayal of an infamous disaster, *THE SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA*. He also, however, did three remarkable *DREAMS OF THE RAREBIT FIEND* animated films. The least of these, *BUG VAUDEVILLE*, portrays various gigantic insects performing "vaudeville" acts. The traditional *RAREBIT* pattern only emerges at the very end, when the last bug attacks the human spectator, causing him to awake from his dream. *THE FLYING HOUSE* tells the story of a woman whose husband has a secret plan to avoid paying his debts. He simply outfits the house with machinery enabling it to fly, and off it goes. The wife is astonished, but passive, and the husband seems to find nothing unusual, exciting or disturbing about anything that happens in the course of the film. In short, they follow standard dream behavior. The film becomes a showcase for McCay's portrayal of outer space, which is where the flying house eventually goes. McCay's drawing throughout his animated cartoons is on a par with that in his strips, and makes the later animated films of the 1920s and early 1930s look primitive indeed as far as graphic excellence goes. The married couple attempt to land on the moon but are chased away by the giant man-in-the-moon who lives there, run out of gas in deep space, and are finally shot down by an earth scientist demonstrating his powerful new cannon, thereby causing the dreamer to awaken. My favorite of the three is *THE PET*, which is based on one of the strips in the 1905 book. A woman brings in a tiny, odd-looking creature, apparently some kind of dog, home with her; her husband is unimpressed. The puppy eats a good deal, and begins growing rapidly. After a while, it has reached such a size that it swallows the cat with one gulp and succeeds in eating the eight-foot stack of coal in the basement. The pet swells to the size of an automobile, and not even the husband's load of rat poison can kill it. Finally, grown to the size of Godzilla, the pet stalks through the city, towering over buildings and pursued by attacking airplanes, as if in anticipation both of Tex Avery's *KING-SIZE CANARY* and *KING KONG*. The planes blow it to pieces, ending the dream.

Wonderful as these animated *RAREBIT* films are, it must be noted that they concentrate on providing humor and a sense of wonder and minimize the serious element so often very much present in the *RAREBIT* strips. In this respect, the films remind me of another fantasy strip contemporary with McCay's, Lyonel Feininger's *THE KIN-DER-KIDS*, which has recently been collected and reprinted by Dover. The characters in this strip are constantly beset by perils—imprisonment, falling from great heights, storms, hungry beasts—but all of them are easily survived or escaped, usually through the characters' own efforts. Nothing can save the victims in the *RAREBIT* dreams except waking up, but the Kin-Der-Kids even have their own *deus ex machina* to help them out if all else fails, a man in Western garb who rides a cloud with his dog and whose name is Mysterious Pete (good name, eh?). *THE KIN-DER-KIDS* is extraordinary visually, but its characters lack much personality, and by so neutralizing the potentially nightmarish aspects of its story-line, the strip lessens its dramatic power. It is the psychological revelations about its characters and the evocation of nightmare that for me give the *DREAMS OF THE RAREBIT FIEND* strips their depth and strength.

McCay's animated films are not the only ones that deal with nightmarish situations. There are a great many animated cartoons that deal with such material, explicitly or otherwise, and some which derive their power from showing how one can survive and rise above a nightmarish predicament. This will be the subject of a future column. •